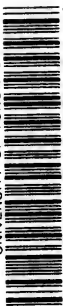
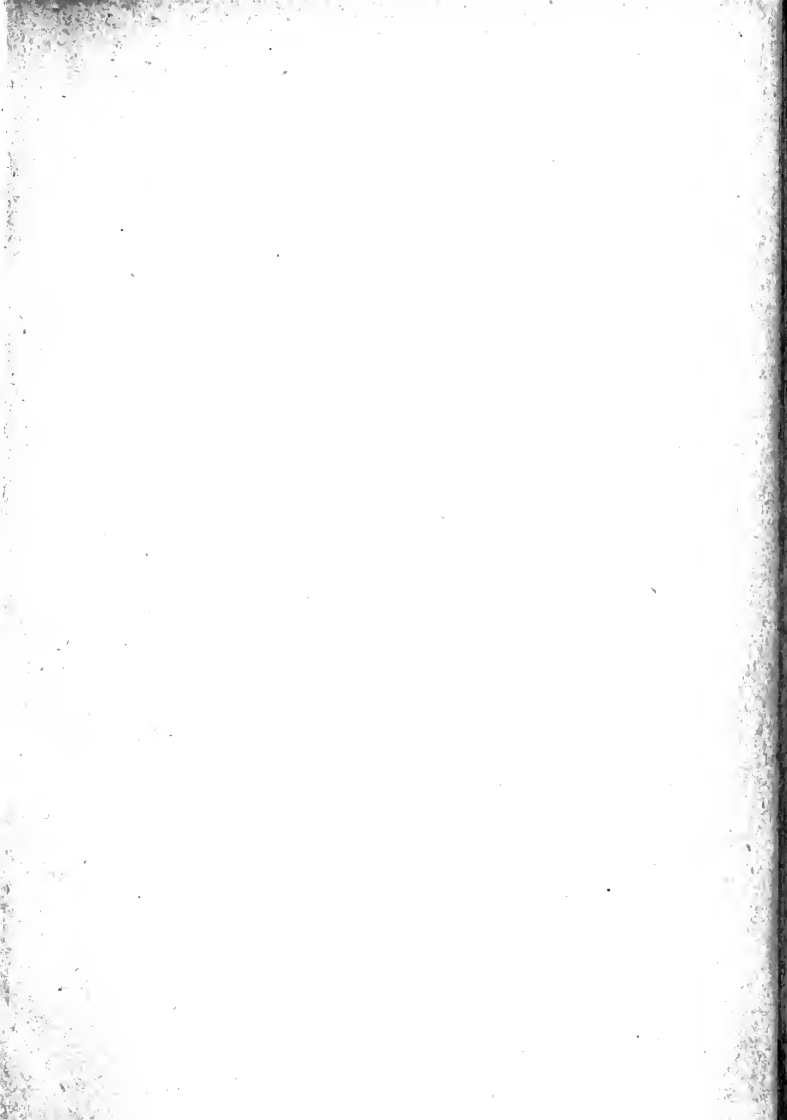


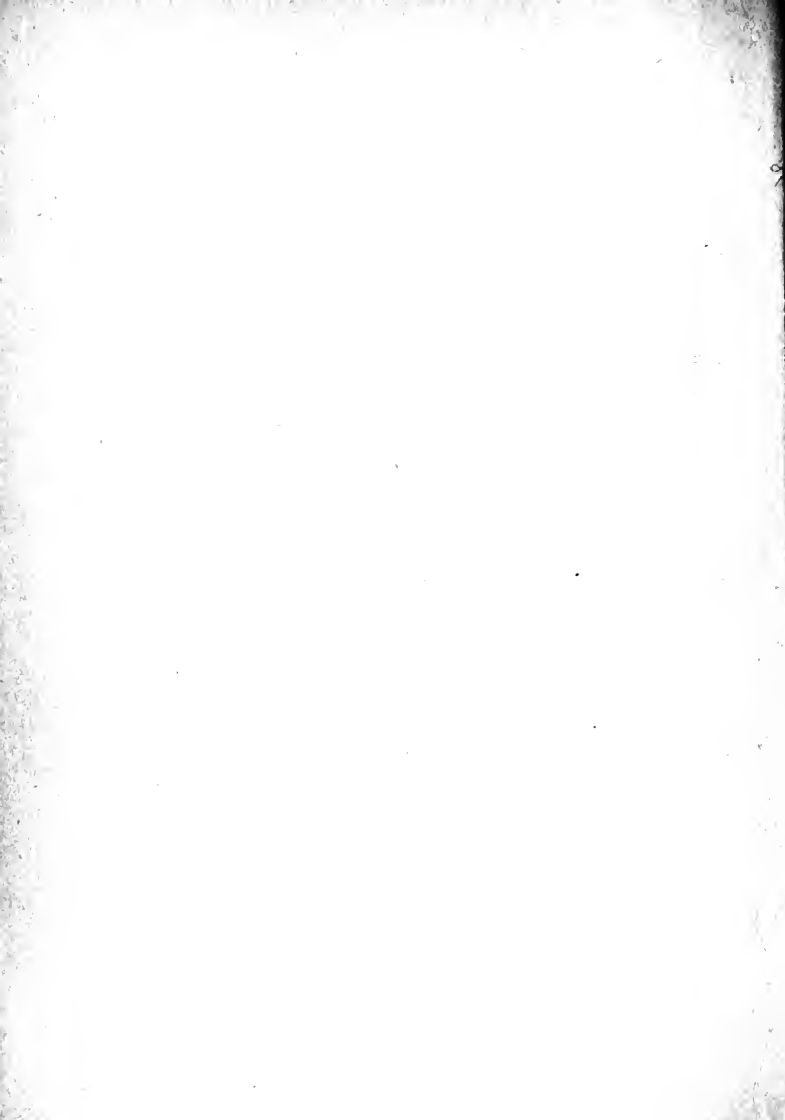
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L'ARRABIATA AND OTHER TALES BY P. HEYSE.

IN ONE VOLUME.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

By the same Author,

THE DEAD LAKE AND OTHER TALES . . 1 vol.
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L'ARRABIATA

AND

OTHER TALES

BY

PAUL HEYSE.

FROM THE GERMAN

BY

MARY WILSON.

Authorized Edition.

LEIPZIG 1867

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

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L'ARRABIATA.

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L'ARRABIATA.

THE day had scarcely dawned. — Over Vesuvius hung one broad grey stripe of mist; stretching across as far as Naples, and darkening all the small towns along the coast. The sea lay calm. But about the marina of the narrow creek, that lies beneath the Sorrento cliffs, fishermen and their wives were at work already, with giant cables drawing their boats to land, and the nets that had been cast the night before. Others were rigging their craft; trimming the sails, and fetching out oars and masts from the great grated vaults that have been built deep into the rocks for shelter to the tackle over night. Nowhere an idle hand; even the very aged, who had long given up going to sea, fell into the long chain of those who were hauling in the nets. Here and there, on some flat housetop, an old woman stood and span; or busied herself about her grandchildren, whom their mother had left to help her husband.

“Do you see, Rachela? yonder is our Padre Curato;” said one, to a little thing of ten, who brandished a small spindle by her side; “Antonio is to row him over to Capri. Madre Santissima! but the reverend signor’s eyes are dull with sleep!” and she waved her hand to a benevolent looking little priest, who was settling him-

self in the boat, and spreading out upon the bench his carefully tucked-up skirts.

The men upon the quay had dropped their work, to see their pastor off, who bowed and nodded kindly, right and left.

"What for must he go to Capri, granny?" asked the child. "Have the people there no priest of their own, that they must borrow ours?"

"Silly thing!" returned the granny. "Priests they have, in plenty — and the most beautiful of churches, and a hermit too, which is more than we have. But there lives a great Signora, who once lived here; she was so very ill! — Many's the time our Padre had to go and take the Most Holy to her, when they thought she could not live the night. But with the Blessed Virgin's help, she did get strong and well — and was able to bathe every day in the sea. When she went away, she left a fine heap of ducats behind her, for our church, and for the poor; and she would not go, they say, until our Padre promised to go and see her over there, that she might confess to him as before. It is quite wonderful, the store she lays by him! — Indeed, and we have cause to bless ourselves for having a curato who has gifts enough for an archbishop; and is in such request with all the great folks. The Madonna be with him!" she cried, and waved her hand again, as the boat was about to put from shore.

"Are we to have fair weather, my son?" enquired the little priest, with an anxious look towards Naples.

"The sun is not yet up;" the young man answered: "When he comes, he will easily do for that small trifle of mist."

"Off with you, then! that we may arrive before the heat."

Antonio was just reaching for his long oar to shove away the boat, when suddenly he paused, and fixed his eyes upon the summit of the steep path that leads down from Sorrento to the water.

A tall and slender girlish figure had become visible upon the heights, and was now hastily stepping down the stones, waving her pocket handkerchief.

She had a small bundle under her arm, and her dress was mean and poor. Yet she had a distinguished, if somewhat savage way of throwing back her head; and the dark tress that wreathed it, on her, was like a diadem.

"What have we to wait for?" enquired the curato. "There is some one coming, who wants to go to Capri. With your permission, Padre. We shall not go a whit the slower. It is a slight young thing, but just eighteen."

At that moment the young girl appeared from behind the wall that bounds the winding path.

"Laurella!" cried the priest, "and what has she to do in Capri?"

Antonio shrugged his shoulders. She came up with hasty steps, her eyes fixed straight before her.

"Ha! l'Arrabiata! good morning!" shouted one or two of the young boatmen. But for the curato's presence, they might have added more; the look of mute defiance with which the young girl received their welcome, appeared to tempt the more mischievous among them.

"Good day, Laurella!" now said the priest; "how are you? Are you coming with us to Capri?"

"If I may, Padre."

"Ask Antonio there, the boat is his. Every man is master of his own, I say; as God is master of us all."

"There is half a carlin, if I may go for that?" said Laurella, without looking at the young boatman.

"You need it more than I;" he muttered, and pushed aside some orange-baskets to make room: he was to sell the oranges in Capri, which little isle of rocks, has never been able to grow enough for all its visitors.

"I do not choose to go for nothing;" said the young girl, with a slight frown of her dark eyebrows.

"Come, child," said the priest; "he is a good lad, and had rather not enrich himself with that little morsel of your poverty. Come now, and step in;" and he stretched out his hand to help her; "and sit you down by me. See now, he has spread his jacket for you, that you may sit the softer; young folks are all alike; for one little maiden of eighteen, they will do more than for ten of us reverend fathers. Nay, no excuse, Tonino. It is the Lord's own doing, that like and like should hold together."

Meantime Laurella had stepped in, and seated herself beside the Padre, first putting away Antonio's jacket, without a word. The young fellow let it lie, and muttering between his teeth, he gave one vigorous push against the pier, and the little boat flew out into the open bay.

"What are you carrying there in that little bundle?" enquired the Padre, as they were floating on over a calm sea, now just beginning to be lighted up with the earliest rays of the rising sun.

"Silk, thread, and a loaf, Padre. The silk is to be sold at Anacapri, to a woman who makes ribbons, and the thread to another."

"Self spun?"

"Yes, sir."

"You once learned to weave ribbons yourself, if I remember right?"

"I did, sir, only mother has been much worse, and I cannot stay so long from home; and a loom to ourselves, we are not rich enough to buy."

"Worse, is she? Ah! dear, dear! when I was with you last, at Easter, she was up."

"The spring is always her worst time, ever since those last great storms, and the earthquakes, she has been forced to keep her bed from pain."

"Pray, my child. Never grow slack of prayers and petitions, that the blessed Virgin may intercede for you; and be industrious and good, that your prayers may find a hearing."

After a pause; "When you were coming toward the shore, I heard them calling after you: 'Good morning, l'Arrabiata!' they said, what made them call you so? it is not a nice name for a young Christian maiden, who should be meek and mild."

The young girl's brown face glowed all over, while her eyes flashed fire.

"They always mock me so, because I do not dance and sing, and stand about to chatter, as other girls do. I might be left in peace, I think; I do *them* no harm."

"Nay, but you might be civil. Let others dance and sing, on whom this life sits lighter, but a kind word now and then, is seemly even from the most afflicted."

Her dark eyes fell, and she drew her eyebrows closer over them, as if she would have hidden them.

They went on a while in silence. The sun now

stood resplendent above the mountain chain; only the tip of mount Vesuvius towered beyond the group of clouds that had gathered about its base. And on the Sorrento plains, the houses were gleaming white from the dark green of their orange-gardens.

"Have you heard no more of that painter, Laurella?" asked the curato; "that Neapolitan, who wished so much to marry you?" She shook her head. "He came to make a picture of you. Why would you not let him?"

"What did he want it for? there are handsomer girls than I; — who knows what he would have done with it? — he might have bewitched me with it, or hurt my soul, or even killed me, mother says."

"Never believe such sinful things!" said the little curato very earnestly; "Are not you ever in God's keeping, without Whose will not one hair of your head can fall; and is one poor mortal with an image in his hand, to prevail against the Lord? Besides, you might have seen that he was fond of you; else why should he want to marry you?"

She said nothing.

"And wherefore did you refuse him? he was an honest man they say; and a comely; and he would have kept you and your mother far better than you ever can yourself, for all your spinning and silk winding."

"We are so poor!" she said passionately; "and mother has been ill so long, we should have become a burthen to him; — and then I never should have done for a Signora. When his friends came to see him, he would only have been ashamed of me."

"How can you say so? I tell you the man was

good and kind;—he would even have been willing to settle in Sorrento. It will not be so easy to find another, sent straight from Heaven to be the saving of you, as this man, indeed, appeared to be.”

“I want no husband; ~~U~~ I never shall;” she said, very stubbornly, half to herself.

“Is this a vow? or do you mean to be a nun?”

She shook her head.

“The people are not so wrong, who call you wilful, although the name they give you is not kind. Have you ever considered that you stand alone in the world, and that your perverseness must make your sick mother’s illness worse to bear, her life more bitter? And what sound reason can you have to give, for rejecting an honest hand, stretched out to help you and your mother? Answer me, Laurella.”

“I have a reason;” she said, reluctantly, and speaking low; “but it is one I cannot give.”

“Not give! not give to me? not to your confessor, whom you surely know to be your friend, — or is he not?”

Laurella nodded.

“Then, child, unburthen your heart. If your reason be a good one, I shall be the very first to uphold you in it. Only you are young, and know so little of the world. A time may come, when you may find cause to regret a chance of happiness, thrown away for some foolish fancy now.”

Shyly she threw a furtive glance over to the other end of the boat, where the young boatman sat, rowing fast. His woollen cap was pulled deep down over his eyes; he was gazing far across the water, with averted head, sunk, as it appeared, in his own meditations.

The priest observed her look, and bent his ear down closer.

"You did not know my father?" — she whispered, while a dark look gathered in her eyes.

"Your father, child! — why, your father died when you were ten years old — what can your father, (Heaven rest his soul in Paradise!) have to do with this present perversity of yours?"

"You did not know him, Padre; you did not know that mother's illness was caused by him alone."

"And how?"

"By his ill treatment of her; he beat her, and trampled upon her. I well remember the nights when he came home in his fits of frenzy — she never said a word, and did everything he bid her. Yet he would beat her so, my heart felt like to break. I used to cover up my head, and pretend to be asleep, but I cried all night. And then when he saw her lying on the floor, quite suddenly he would change, and lift her up and kiss her, till she screamed, and said he smothered her. Mother forbade me ever to say a word of this; but it wore her out. And in all these long years since father died, she has never been able to get well again. And if she should soon die, which God forbid! I know who it was that killed her."

The little curato's head wagged slowly to and fro; he seemed uncertain how far to acquiesce in the young girl's reasons. At length he said: "Forgive him, as your mother has forgiven! — And turn your thoughts from such distressing pictures, Laurella; there may be better days in store for you, which will make you forget the past."

"Never shall I forget that!" — she said, and shuddered; — "and you must know, Padre, it is the reason why I have resolved to remain unmarried. I never will be subject to a man, who may beat and then caress me. Were a man now to want to beat or kiss me, I could defend myself; but mother could not: — neither from his blows or kisses, because she loved him. Now I will never so love a man as to be made ill and wretched by him."

"You are but a child; and you talk like one who knows nothing at all of life. Are all men like that poor father of yours? do all illtreat their wives, and give vent to every whim, and gust of passion? Have you never seen a good man yet? or known good wives, who live in peace and harmony with their husbands?"

"But nobody ever knew how father was to mother; — she would have died sooner than complained, or told of him — and all because she loved him." "If this be love; — if love can close our lips when they should cry out for help; if it is to make us suffer without resistance, worse than even our worst enemy could make us suffer, then I say, I never will be fond of mortal man."

"I tell you you are childish; you know not what you are saying. When your time comes, you are not likely to be consulted whether you choose to fall in love or not." After a pause; "And that painter: did you think he could have been cruel?"

"He made those eyes I have seen my father make, when he begged my mother's pardon, and took her in his arms to make it up — I know those eyes. A man may make such eyes, and yet find it in his heart to

beat a wife who never did a thing to vex him! It made my flesh creep to see those eyes again."

After this, she would not say another word. — Also the curato remained silent. He bethought himself of more than one wise saying, wherewith the maiden might have been admonished; but he refrained, in consideration of the young boatman, who had been growing rather restless towards the close of this confession. —

When, after two hours' rowing, they reached the little bay of Capri, Antonio took the padre in his arms, and carried him through the last few ripples of shallow water, to set him reverently down upon his legs on dry land. But Laurella did not wait for him to wade back and fetch her. Gathering up her little petticoat, holding in one hand her wooden shoes, and in the other her little bundle, with one splashing step or two, she had reached the shore. "I have some time to stay at Capri," said the priest. "You need not wait — I may not perhaps return before to-morrow. When you get home, Laurella, remember me to your mother; — I will come and see her within the week. — You mean to go back before it gets dark?" —

"If I find an opportunity," answered the young girl, turning all her attention to her skirts.

"I must return, you know;" said Antonio, in a tone which he believed to be of great indifference — "I shall wait here till the Ave Maria — if you should not come, it is the same to me."

"You must come;" interposed the little priest: — "you never can leave your mother all alone at night — Is it far you have to go?"

"To a vineyard by Anacapri."

"And I to Capri, so now God bless you, child — and you, my son."

Laurella kissed his hand, and let one farewell drop, for the Padre and Antonio to divide between them. Antonio, however, appropriated no part of it to himself, he pulled off his cap exclusively to the padre, without even looking at Laurella. But after they had turned their backs, he let his eyes travel but a short way with the padre, as he went toiling over the deep bed of small loose stones; he soon sent them after the maiden, who, turning to the right, had begun to climb the heights, holding one hand above her eyes to protect them from the scorching sun. Just before the path disappeared behind high walls, she stopped, as if to gather breath, and looked behind her. At her feet lay the marina; the rugged rocks rose high around her; the sea was shining in the rarest of its deep blue splendour. The scene was surely worth a moment's pause. But as chance would have it, her eye, in glancing past Antonio's boat, met with Antonio's own, which had been following her as she climbed.

Each made a slight movement, as persons do who would excuse themselves for some mistake; and then, with her darkest look, the maiden went her way.

Hardly one hour had passed since noon, and yet for the last two, Antonio had been sitting waiting on the bench before the fisher's tavern. He must have been very much preoccupied with something, for he jumped up every moment to step out into the sunshine, and look carefully up and down the roads, which, parting right and left, lead to the only two little towns upon the

Island. He did not altogether trust the weather, he then said to the hostess of the Osteria; to be sure, it was clear enough, but he did not quite like that tint of sea and sky. Just so it had looked, he said, before that last awful storm, when the English family had been so nearly lost; surely she must remember it?

No, indeed, she said, she didn't.

Well, if the weather should happen to change before the night, she was to think of him, he said.

"Have you many fine folk over there?" she asked him, after a while.

"They are only just beginning; as yet, the season has been bad enough; those who came to bathe, came late.

"The spring came late. Have you not been earning more than we at Capri?"

"Not enough to give me macaroni twice a week, if I had had nothing but the boat; — only a letter now and then to take to Naples; — or a gentleman to row out into the open sea, that he might fish. But you know I have an uncle who is rich: — he owns more than one fine orange garden, — and; 'Tonino,' says he to me; 'while I live you shall not suffer want, and when I am gone you will find that I have taken care of you;' and so, with God's help, I got through the winter."

• "Has he children, this uncle who is so rich?"

"No, he never married; he was long in foreign parts, and many a good piastre he has laid together. He is going to set up a great fishing business, and set me over it, to see the rights of it."

"Why, then you are a made man, Tonino!"

The young boatman shrugged his shoulders. "Every man has his own burthen;" he said, starting up again to have another look at the weather, turning his eyes

right and left, although he must have known that there can be no weather side but one.

"Let me fetch you another bottle;" said the Hostess; "your uncle can well afford to pay for it."

"Not more than one glass, it is a fiery wine you have in Capri, and my head is hot already."

"It does not heat the blood; you may drink as much of it as you like. And here is my husband coming, so you must sit awhile, and talk to him."

And in fact, with his nets over his shoulder, and his red cap upon his curly head, down came the comely padrone of the Osteria. He had been taking a dish of fish to that great lady, to set before the little curato. As soon as he caught sight of the young boatman, he began waving him a most cordial welcome; and came to sit beside him on the bench, chattering and asking questions. Just as his wife was bringing her second bottle of pure unadulterated Capri, they heard the crisp sand crunch, and Laurella was seen approaching from the left hand road to Anacapri. She nodded slightly in salutation; then stopped, and hesitated.

Antonio sprang from his seat; — "I must go," he said; "It is a young Sorrento girl, who came over with the Signor curato in the morning. She has to get back to her sick mother before night."

"Well well, time enough yet before night;" observed the fisherman; "time enough to take a glass of wine. Wife, I say, another glass!"

"I thank you; I had rather not;" — and Laurella kept her distance.

"Fill the glasses, wife; fill them both, I say; she only wants a little pressing."

"Don't," interposed the lad. "It is a wilful head of her own she has; a saint could not persuade her to what she does not choose." And taking a hasty leave, he ran down to the boat, loosened the rope and stood waiting for Laurella. — Again she bent her head to the hostess, and slowly approached the water, with lingering steps — she looked around on every side, as if in hopes of seeing some other passenger. But the marina was deserted. The fishermen were asleep, or rowing about the coast with rods or nets; a few women and children sat before their doors, spinning or sleeping — such strangers as had come over in the morning, were waiting for the cool of the evening to return. She had not time to look about her long; before she could prevent him, Antonio had seized her in his arms, and carried her to the boat, as if she had been an infant. He leapt in after her, and with a stroke or two of his oar, they were in deep water.

She had seated herself at the end of the boat, half turning her back to him, so that he could only see her profile. She wore a sterner look than ever, the low straight brow was shaded by her hair; the rounded lips were firmly closed; only the delicate nostril occasionally gave a wilful quiver. After they had gone on a while in silence, she began to feel the scorching of the sun; and unloosening her bundle, she threw the handkerchief over her head, and began to make her dinner of the bread; for in Capri she had eaten nothing.

Antonio did not stand this long; he fetched out a couple of the oranges, with which the baskets had been filled in the morning: "Here is something to eat to your bread, Laurella;" he said: "don't think I kept them for you; they had rolled out of the basket,

and I only found them when I brought the baskets back to the boat."

"Eat them yourself; bread is enough for me."

"They are refreshing in this heat, and you have had to walk so far."

"They gave me a drink of water, and that refreshed me."

"As you please;" he said, — and let them drop into the basket.

Silence again; the sea was smooth as glass. Not a ripple was heard against the prow. Even the white seabirds that roost among those caves, pursued their prey with soundless flight.

"You might take the oranges to your mother;" again commenced Tonino.

"We have oranges at home, and when they are done, I can go and buy some more."

"Nay, take these to her, and give them to her with my compliments."

"She does not know you."

"You could tell her who I am."

"I do not know you either."

It was not for the first time that she denied him thus. One Sunday of last year, when that painter had first come to Sorrento, Antonio had chanced to be playing Boccia with some other young fellows, in the little piazza by the chief street.

There, for the first time, had the painter caught sight of Laurella, who, with her pitcher on her head, had passed by without taking any notice of him. The Neapolitan, struck by her appearance, stood still and gazed after her, not heeding that he was standing in the very midst of the game, which, with two steps, he

might have cleared. A very ungentle ball came knocking against his shins, as a reminder that this was not the spot to choose for meditation. He looked round, as if in expectation of some excuse. But the young boatman who had thrown the ball, stood silent among his friends, in an attitude of so much defiance, that the stranger had found it more advisable to go his ways, and avoid discussion. Still, this little encounter had been spoken of; particularly at the time when the painter had been pressing his suit to Laurella. "I do not even know him;" she had said, indignantly, when the painter asked her whether it was for the sake of that uncourteous lad, she now refused him? But she had heard that piece of gossip, and known Antonio well enough, when she had met him since.

And now they sat together in this boat, like two most deadly enemies, while their hearts were beating fit to kill them. Antonio's usually so good humoured face was heated scarlet; he struck the oars so sharply that the foam flew over to where Laurella sat; while his lips moved, as if muttering angry words. She pretended not to notice; wearing her most unconscious look, bending over the edge of the boat, and letting the cool water pass between her fingers. Then she threw off her handkerchief again, and began to smooth her hair, as though she had been alone. Only her eyebrows twitched, and she held up her wet hands in vain attempts to cool her burning cheeks.

Now they were well out into the open sea. The island was far behind, and the coast before them lay yet distant in the hot haze. Not a sail was within sight, far or near; not even a passing gull to break the stillness. Antonio looked all round; evidently ripening

some hasty resolution. The colour faded suddenly from his cheek, and he dropped his oars. Laurella looked round involuntarily; — fearless, — but yet attentive.

"I must make an end of this;" the young fellow burst forth. "It has lasted too long already. I only wonder that it has not killed me! — you say you do not know me? And all this time, you must have seen me pass you like a madman, my whole heart full of what I had to tell you, and then you only made your crossest mouth, and turned your back upon me."

"What had I to say to you?" she curtly said. "I may have seen that you were inclined to meddle with me, but I do not choose to be on people's wicked tongues for nothing. I do not mean to have you for a husband. Neither you, nor any other."

"Nor any other? so will you not always say! — You say so now, because you would not have that painter. Bah! you were but a child! You will feel lonely enough yet, some day; and then, wild as you are, you will take the next best who comes to hand."

"Who knows? which of us can see the future? It may be that I change my mind. What is that to you?"

"What it is to me?" he flew out, starting to his feet, while the small boat leapt and danced; "what it is to me, you say? You know well enough! I tell you, that man shall perish miserably, to whom you shall prove kinder than you have been to me!"

"And to you, what did I ever promise? — Am I to blame, if you be mad? — What right have you to me?"

"Ah! I know," he cried, "my right is written no-

where. It has not been put in Latin by any lawyer, nor stamped with any seal. But this I feel; I have just the right to you, I have to Heaven, if I die an honest Christian. Do you think I could look on, and see you go to church with another man, and see the girls go by, and shrug their shoulders at me?"

"You can do as you please. I am not going to let myself be frightened by all those threats. I also mean to do as I please."

"You shall not say so long!" and his whole frame shook with passion. "I am not the man to let my whole life be spoiled by a stubborn wench like you! You are in my power here, remember, and may be made to do my bidding."

She could not repress a start, but her eyes flashed bravely on him.

"You may kill me, if you dare," she said slowly.

"I do nothing by halves," he said, and his voice sounded choked and hoarse. "There is room for us both in the sea; I cannot help thee, child," — he spoke the last words dreamily, almost pitifully; — "but we must both go down together — both at once — and now!" he shouted, and snatched her in his arms. But at the same moment, he drew back his right hand; the blood gushed out; — she had bitten him fiercely.

"Ha! can I be made to do your bidding?" she cried, and thrust him from her, with one sudden movement; "am I here in your power?" and she leapt into the sea, and sank.

She rose again directly; her scanty skirts clung close; her long hair, loosened by the waves, hung heavy about her neck, she struck out valiantly, and, without

uttering a sound, she began to swim steadily from the boat towards the shore.

With senses maimed by sudden terror, he stood, with outstretched neck, looking after her; his eyes fixed, as though they had just been witness to a miracle. Then, giving himself a shake, he pounced upon his oars, and began rowing after her with all the strength he had, while all the time, the bottom of the boat was reddening fast, with the blood that kept streaming from his hand.

Rapidly as she swam, he was at her side in a moment. "For the love of our most Holy Virgin," he cried; "get into the boat! — I have been a madman! God alone can tell what so suddenly darkened my brain. It came upon me like a flash of lightning, and set me all on fire. — I knew not what I did or said. I do not even ask you to forgive me, Laurella, only to come into the boat again, and not to risk your life!"

She swam on, as though she had not heard him.

"You can never swim to land. — I tell you, it is two miles off. — Think upon your mother! If you should come to grief, I should die of horror."

She measured the distance with her eye, and then, without answering him one word, she swam up to the boat, and laid her hands upon the edge; he rose to help her in. As the boat tilted over to one side, with the young girl's weight, his jacket that was lying on the bench, slipped into the water. Agile as she was, she swung herself on board without assistance, and gained her former seat; as soon as he saw that she was safe, he took to his oars again, while she began quietly wringing out her dripping clothes, and shaking the

water from her hair. As her eyes fell upon the bottom of the boat, and saw the blood, she gave a quick look at the hand, which held the oar as if it had been unhurt.

"Take this," she said; and held out her pocket-handkerchief. He shook his head, and went on rowing. After a time, she rose, and stepping up to him, she bound the handkerchief firmly round the wound, which was very deep. Then, heedless of his endeavours to prevent her, she took an oar, and seating herself opposite him, she began to row with steady strokes, keeping her eyes from looking towards him; — fixed upon the oar that was scarlet with his blood. Both were pale and silent; as they drew near land, such fishermen as they met began shouting after Antonio, and jibing at Laurella, but neither of them moved an eyelid, or spoke one word.

The sun stood yet high over Procida, when they landed at the Marina. Laurella shook out her petticoat, now nearly dry, and jumped on shore. The old spinning woman, who, in the morning, had seen them start, was still upon her terrace. She called down: "what is that upon your hand, Tonino? — Jesus Christ! — the boat is full of blood!"

"It is nothing, Commare;" the young fellow replied. "I tore my hand against a nail that was sticking out too far, it will be well to-morrow. It is only this confounded ready blood of mine, that always makes a thing look worse than needful."

"Let me come and bind it up, Comparello; stop one moment, I will go and fetch the herbs, and come to you directly."

"Never trouble yourself, Commare. It has been

dressed already, to-morrow morning it will be all over and forgotten. I have a healthy skin, that heals directly."

"Addio!" said Laurella, turning to the path that goes winding up the cliffs. "Good night!" he answered, without looking at her; and then taking his oars and baskets from the boat, and climbing up the small stone stairs, he went into his own hut.

He was alone in his two little rooms, and began to pace them up and down. Cooler than upon the dead calm sea, the breeze blew fresh through the small unglazed windows, which were only to be closed with wooden shutters. The solitude was soothing to him. He stopped before the little image of the Virgin, devoutly gazing upon the glory round the head (made of stars cut out in silver paper). But he did not want to pray. What reason had he to pray, now that he had lost all he had ever hoped for?

And this day appeared to last for ever. He did so long for night! for he was weary, and more exhausted by the loss of blood, than he would have cared to own. His hand was very sore: seating himself upon a little stool, he untied the handkerchief that bound it, the blood, so long repressed, gushed out again; all round the wound the hand was swollen high.

He washed it carefully; cooling it in the water; then he clearly saw the marks of Laurella's teeth.

"She was right," he said — "I was a brute and deserved no better. I will send her back the handkerchief by Giuseppe, to-morrow. Never shall she set eyes on me again." — And he washed the handkerchief with greatest care, and spread it out in the sun to dry.

And having bound up his hand again, as well as he could manage with his teeth and his left hand, he threw himself upon his bed, and closed his eyes.

He was soon waked up from a sort of slumber, by the rays of the bright moonlight, and also by the pain of his hand; he had just risen for more cold water to soothe its throbbings, when he heard the sound of some one at his door; "Who is there?" he cried, and went to open it: Laurella stood before him.

She came in without a question, took off the handkerchief she had tied over her head, and placed her little basket upon the table; — then she drew a deep breath.

"You are come to fetch your handkerchief," he said: "you need not have taken that trouble. In the morning, I would have asked Giuseppe to take it to you."

"It is not the handkerchief;" she said, quickly; "I have been up among the hills to gather herbs to stop the blood; see here." And she lifted the lid of her little basket.

"Too much trouble," he said not in bitterness; — "far too much trouble; I am better, much better; but if I were worse, it would be no more than I deserve. Why did you come at such a time? If anyone should see you? — You know how they talk! Even when they don't know what they are saying."

"I care for no one's talk;" she said, passionately: "I came to see your hand, and put the herbs upon it; you cannot do it with your left."

"It is not worth while, I tell you."

"Let me see it then, if I am to believe you."

She took his hand, that was not able to prevent

her, and unbound the linen. When she saw the swelling, she shuddered, and gave a cry: — "Jesus Maria!"

"It is a little swollen," he said; "it will be over in four and twenty hours."

She shook her head. "It will certainly be a week, before you can go to sea."

"More likely a day or two, and if not, what matters?"

She had fetched a bason, and began carefully washing out the wound, which he suffered passively, like a child. She then laid on the healing leaves, which at once relieved the burning pain, and finally bound it up with the linen she had brought with her.

When it was done; "I thank you," he said; "and now, if you would do me one more kindness, forgive the madness that came over me; forget all I said, and did. I cannot tell how it came to pass, certainly it was not your fault; not yours. And never shall you hear from me again one word to vex you."

She interrupted him: "It is I who have to beg your pardon. I should have spoken differently. I might have explained it better, and not enraged you with my sullen ways. And now that bite! —"

"It was in self-defence — it was high time to bring me to my senses. As I said before, it is nothing at all to signify. Do not talk of being forgiven, you only did me good, and I thank you for it; and now, — here is your handkerchief; take it with you."

He held it to her, but yet she lingered; hesitated, and appeared to have some inward struggle — at length she said; "You have lost your jacket, and by my fault; and I know that all the money for the oranges was in

it. I did not think of this till afterwards. I cannot replace it now, we have not so much at home; — or if we had, it would be mother's; — but this I have; this silver cross. That painter left it on the table, the day he came for the last time — I have never looked at it all this while, and do not care to keep it in my box; if you were to sell it? It must be worth a few piastres, mother says. It might make up the money you have lost; and if not quite, I could earn the rest by spinning at night, when mother is asleep."

"Nothing will make me take it;" he said shortly, pushing away the bright new cross, which she had taken from her pocket.

"You must," she said; "how can you tell how long your hand may keep you from your work? There it lies; and nothing can make me so much as look at it again."

"Drop it in the sea, then."

"It is no present I want to make you, it is no more than is your due, it is only fair."

"Nothing from you can be due to me, and hereafter when we chance to meet, if you would do me a kindness, I beg you not to look my way. It would make me feel you were thinking of what I have done. And now good night, and let this be the last word said."

She laid the handkerchief in the basket, and also the cross, and closed the lid. But when he looked into her face, he started; — great heavy drops were rolling down her cheeks; she let them flow unheeded.

"Maria Santissima!" he cried. "Are you ill? — You are trembling from head to foot!"

"It is nothing," she said; "I must go home;" and

with unsteady steps she was moving to the door, when suddenly a passion of weeping overcame her, and leaning her brow against the wall, she fell into a fit of bitter sobbing. Before he could go to her, she turned upon him suddenly, and fell upon his neck.

"I cannot bear it," she cried, clinging to him as a dying thing to life — "I cannot bear it, I cannot let you speak so kindly, and bid me go, with all this on my conscience. Beat me! trample on me, curse me! Or if it can be that you love me still, after all I have done to you, take me and keep me, and do with me as you please; only do not send me so away!" — She could say no more for sobbing.

Speechless, he held her a while in his arms. "If I can love you still!" he cried at last. "Holy mother of God! Do you think that all my best heart's blood has gone from me, through that little wound? Don't you hear it hammering now, as though it would burst my breast, and go to you? But if you say this to try me, or because you pity me, I can forget it — you are not to think you owe me this, because you know what I have suffered for you."

"No!" she said very resolutely, looking up from his shoulder, into his face, with her tearful eyes; "it is because I love you; — and let me tell you, it was because I always feared to love you, that I was so cross. I will be so different now — I never could bear again to pass you in the street, without one look! And lest you should ever feel a doubt, I will kiss you, that you may say, 'she kissed me:' and Laurella kisses no man but her husband."

She kissed him thrice, and escaping from his arms: "And now good night, amor mio, cara vita mia!" she

said. "Lie down to sleep, and let your hand get well. Do not come with me; I am afraid of no man, save of you alone."

And so she slipped out, and soon disappeared in the shadow of the wall.

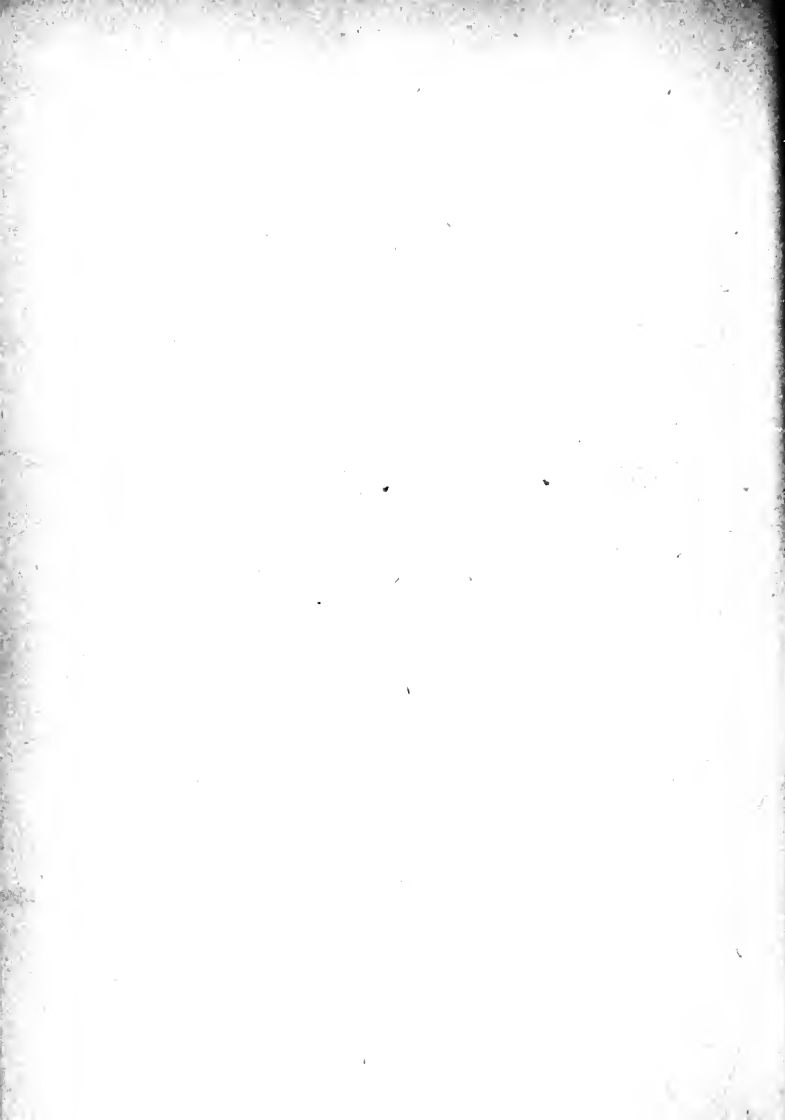
He remained standing by the window; gazing far out over the calm sea, while all the stars in Heaven appeared to flit before his eyes.

The next time the little curato sat in his confessional, he sat smiling to himself: Laurella had just risen from her knees after a very long confession.

"Who would have thought it?" he said musingly; "that the Lord would so soon have taken pity upon that wayward little heart? And I had been reproaching myself, for not having adjured more sternly that ill demon of perversity. Our eyes are but shortsighted to see the ways of Heaven!"

"Well, may God bless her I say! and let me live to go to sea with Laurella's eldest born, rowing me in his father's place! Ah! well, indeed! L'Arrabiata!"

COUNT ERNEST'S HOME.



COUNT ERNEST'S HOME.

WHILE I was at College, I chanced, one summer, to fall into habits of frequent and intimate intercourse with a young man, whose intellectual countenance and refinement of character never failed to exercise a winning influence, even upon the most cursory of his acquaintance.

I may call our connection intimate; for I was the only one of our student set, whom he ever asked to go and see him, or himself occasionally visited. But in our relations, there was nothing of that wild, exuberant, often obtrusive kind of fraternizing, affected by our studious youth. From that, we were as far, when we parted in the autumn, as we had been on our first walk by the Rhine; when the same road, and the same delight in the marvellous beauty of the spring scenery before us, had first introduced us to each other's notice.

Even of his worldly circumstances, I had learned but little. I had heard that he came of an ancient and noble house; — that his boyhood had been passed at his father, Count ***'s castle, under the direction of a French tutor, with whom he had then been sent to travel; and finally, at his own express desire, to college. There, he had ascertained, what he had long suspected; viz.: that in each and every branch of regular instruction, he was totally deficient — Upon which, straightway he

shut himself up with books and private tutors; — suffered the tumult of loose Burschen-life to sweep by him, without once lifting his eyes from his task; — and by the time I knew him, he had got so far as to rise every morning with the *Ethica* of Aristotle, and to lie down, at night, with a chorus of Euripides.

Not a shade of pedantry; — not a taint of scholastic rust, — was left to clog the free play of his mind, at the close of all those years of sharp-set study. — Numbers of industrious people work, because they do not know how to live. But his life was in his work; — he took science in its plenitude, with all his faculties at once. He acknowledged no intellectual gain, that did not tend to elevate his character, or stood at variance with his mental instincts.

In this sense, his was, perhaps, the most ideal nature I ever knew; if the term be not abused, as it too often is, to mean a vapid kind of beauty worship, and a sentimental distaste for rough realities; but used in its loftier, and certainly far rarer sense: an ideal standard of human character, resolutely upheld, and steadily pursued; with undaunted spirit, if with moderate expectations; and at whatever sacrifice of present brilliance and success, a thorough contempt of cram, as well as of every other form of professional narrow mindedness.

It is quite conceivable therefore, that the coarser kind of student pleasures could not prove ensnaring to this young hermit, whose seclusion came to be interpreted as aristocratic prejudice, from which no man could be more free. Education may have done something to confirm his natural aversion to all that was coarse, excessive, or impure. But as his scrupulous personal cleanliness was innate, so also was his almost

maidenly delicacy in matters of morality. Never have I met such firmness of resolve, never so much masculine energy of intellect, united to so girlish a reluctance to talk of love and love affairs. Consequently, he kept aloof from all those clamorous carouses, where, amidst the fumes of liquor and tobacco, liberty and patriotism, love and friendship, God and immortality, are in their turns, discussed on the same broad basis of easy joviality as the last ball, or the newest cut of College cap. Even in a tête à tête, where he could so eloquently hold forth on any scientific problem, he very rarely touched on questions dealing with the most private and personal interests of man. History, diplomacy, politics, or the classics, were subjects he would discuss with passionate eagerness. Then he could wax as warm and fluent in debate, as though he were addressing a listening nation he would have won to some great purpose. To things of common life, he rarely referred. Of his own family, I never heard him speak. His father, he mentioned only once.

One evening, when I went to ask him whether he would join me in a row upon the river; — in one of those excursions of which he was so fond, when we used to take a little boat to a tavern a mile or two below the town, and, after a frugal meal, to walk home by starlight; — I found him just as he had thrown aside his pen, and was struggling with the resolution necessary to dress for an evening party.

"Pity me!" he cried, as I came in; "only look at that magnificent sunset, and imagine that I am doomed to turn my back upon it, and to go where I shall see no other midnight splendour but that of the stars on dress-coats!"

And he mentioned one of the most distinguished houses in the town, where a party was to be given in honor of some passing diplomate.

"And must you?" — I asked, with sincerest sympathy. For all our intimacy, we had never come to saying thou. —

"I must," he sighed; "my father, who has set his heart on making a diplomate of me, whether I will or no, would be indignant if I were to go home without being able to inform him, whether the suppers at Baron N.'s are still such as to justify their European reputation. Hitherto, I have been so culpable as to ignore them, and now, at the last, I have to fill up these blanks in my course of study."

He saw me smile, and hastily added: "My father, you must know, has, if possible, a still more uncivil opinion than I have of the liveried nonentities that stop the way in that kind of society; only what he finds wanting in them, is not what I do. — He is of the old school; a diplomate of the Empire. He has seen the world in flames, and cannot forget the demoniac light by which he then saw all things, good and bad; fair and foul; high and low. Now the world is quiet, and regular enough; but sleepy, tame, and colorless. At least he thinks so. Still it is the world, and he who would rule in his generation, must make himself acquainted with his subjects. He gave me very few maxims to take away with me, when I came here; but this one, certainly with fifty variations, 'Read men more than books.' — "When I was at your age," he used to say, "books played a very subordinate part in the world. I have known many a clever man, who from the time he entered into society never read a line save the

newest novel, or the latest war-bulletin, and never wrote a syllable, except in love-letters or dispatches. He had all the more time to act, or, if necessary, to think; — and when is it *not* necessary to think? But learning, book-learning! *we* never thought of such a thing, and yet, we knew everything, of course. — It was in the air; and where, now-a-days, you very soon get to the end of your Latin, our French took us a good way farther.”

“So I considered that as settled, and more than once I have girded up my loins, to go and read these men, and study them. But after the first few pages, I generally found out that their titles were the most important part about them. Either I am a stupid reader; (a ‘kind reader’, I know I am *not*!), or else the great world of the present day really is a most insipid study.”

His carriage came to the door, and I went away, for I had often noticed that it embarrassed him, when any one was present while he was dressing.

At a later hour, as I chanced to pass the house where the aristocracy of ** was to be assembled, I saw him getting out of the carriage; we exchanged a short look with a shade of irony; and then he went slowly up the carpetted steps, and I looked after him, while I felt proud of his knightly bearing, and of the grace of his stalwart figure.

He could be dangerous to womankind, as I had heard from several sources. They even told a story of a distinguished Englishwoman, who, after divers attempts to win him, attempts as fruitless as unequivocal, had at last gone off in rage and undisguised despair, after having wrung her parrot's neck, for screaming from the window, day and night, the name of the coy young count.

I was not able to learn more of this, nor of any other of his adventures; he carefully avoided any conversation about women; still, nothing he ever said could have led me to assume that he thought meanly of them, or that he was suffering from any hidden wound, of which he could not bear the probing.

Judging by the whole tenor of his conduct, I decided, that, striving as he did, at aims so serious, he found no time for trifling flirtations, and never had been touched by a deeper feeling. His mother had died very soon after the birth of her first-born son, but he would occasionally receive letters, addressed in a feminine hand, and he told me they came from an old nurse of his, who had been as a second mother to him. She was evidently very dear to him; but even of her he spoke but little; eager discussions upon his own studies, or on mine, were ever burning on his lips.

He was several years in advance of me, and when we parted in the autumn, he went to pass his diplomatic examination at Berlin. We bid each other a very affectionate farewell, without much hope of continuous intercourse; — we knew that what we had hitherto exchanged, no correspondence could have replaced. But we were young, and we parted in the confident hope that life and its chances must, in some way or other, bring us together again.

For many a long year, I heard nothing of him but his name; the last I learned was from a newspaper, which stated that Count Ernest *** had been appointed secretary of Legation at Stockholm. Again a long time elapsed, without the smallest tidings of him, and I confess that his image had considerably faded in my memory, when it chanced, that, on a pedestrian tour,

I suddenly lit upon his name, printed upon a road-post that pointed to a deep lane, all overgrown with brushwood, cutting at right angles the road which I had taken. I stopped, and, as if by a magician's wand, the country round me seemed metamorphosed.

Again the Rhine was rolling at my feet, and again I saw his straight lithe figure, as he walked along, holding his hat in his hand, and letting the fresh breeze from the current play among his luxuriant hair of reddish gold; and those fine eyes of his, so full of thought, gazing over the river towards the mountains, until my voice would rouse him from his musings. This visionary play of memory lasted but a moment, and then an incontrollable desire came over me to look upon that face once more, and abundantly to make up for what I had lost so long.

It was early in the afternoon; I hoped that I should not mistake the road, and never doubted but that at this autumn season, I should find my friend at home; he was an eager sportsman, and had spoken far oftener of the trees, than of the persons he had known from childhood.

I may have followed this ravine for about an hour, when it suddenly occurred to me as strange, that the road should be so neglected and overgrown; it was evident that no sort of carriage could possibly have passed this way for years. The foliage of past autumns lay mouldering in deep crevices; — here and there, a fragment of rock, or rotten branch, had been hurled from the edge by the winter storms; only in the firmest parts of the ground, were occasional tracks of human passage. I sent my doubts to sleep, with the supposition, that long before this, some other and more level road, must have

been made between the castle and the plain. And yet, on entering the ravine, I had certainly ascertained that no nearer way was possible, from the little manufacturing town I had left behind. At the summit of the pass, where half a dozen neglected paths diverged, I stopped, in real perplexity. I climbed up a wide armed beech-tree, and looked all round me.

A deep circular hollow lay before me, almost like a lake, filled with lovely bright green waves of densest foliage. It was a vast forest of old beech-trees. Just in the centre rose the turrets of the castle, over which the wilderness seemed to close.

It was like a fairy tale, to see the spires and weather-cocks glittering in the bright autumn sun; as in those stories of sunken castles, which shew their pinacles on some clear day, peeping from the hidden depths of water. There was not a sound of human life; the woodpecker tapped monotonously against the trees; — a careless deer ran past me, with more surprise than terror; — while swarms of audacious squirrels, among the branches, were aiming at the intruder, with the empty husks of beechnuts.

I was on the point of giving it up, when, with a sharper look at the enchanted castle, I saw a thin thread of smoke, to inform me that it could not exclusively be harbouring hobgoblins.

That the owner had not been here for ages, might, with some degree of certainty, be surmised; but some sort of castellan or game-keeper might be there, and from him, I hoped to hear some tidings of my friend and his welfare, and at least to spend a night in a home which he had loved with all his heart.

I took one of these downward paths at a venture,

and soon plunged into the strangest, darkest night of wood that ever stirred above a wanderer's head.

And in the night come dreams; — and these soon wove a spell about me, and I quite forgot whence I had come, and whither I was going, and blindly left my legs to guide me, as they stepped uniformly on, until they came to an involuntary halt, at a broad stream, where not a trace of path could be discerned; the trees stood thick, interlacing their branches with the brushwood, and forming an impenetrable barrier. I immediately turned back, and walked steadily upwards, until a path to the right again seduced me; then I tried another downwards, went astray again, and so went wandering on for hours, making the whole round of the valley, without catching a single glimpse of the castle peeping through the thickets. The moon was already shining upon the tree tops, and I made up my mind to pass the night in the airiest of lodgings.

Suddenly, when I least expected it, the brushwood opened, and there, like an island in the midst of a lake of verdure, the old grey building stood square before me, with countless glassless windows, but without one trace of human habitation. A broad stone-bridge across the dried-up moat, reached right into the dark court, from which the three square wings of the building rose ponderous and unadorned. Not a balcony, nor jutting window, was there to relieve the stern monotony of the walls; nothing but a gigantic coat of arms hewn in stone above the gateway, in which I recognised the bearings of a well-remembered signet ring.

Nearer to the roof, the castle wore a gayer aspect

the copper-plates about the gables shone mildly in the moonbeams, and the numerous chimney tops with weathercocks and flagstuffs, seemed all spangled over with silver. Nowhere a light; nor a window opened to the evening air; even the smoke I had seen upon the roof was gone.

As I stood upon the bridge, and looked upon the rank vegetation, which, struggling upwards, was choking up the moat; and then at the forest pressing onwards to the very threshold of the castle, the thought would force itself upon me, that in fifty years or so, all this vast work of human hands would be destroyed and overcome by the exuberance of nature; that these tall beeches would thrust their branches into the deserted halls; would take possession of the court, and sink their roots deep into the vaulted cellars; till, stone by stone, the whole fabric would give way, and again the forest reign alone.

I entered the court-yard; and where the long grass that grew in the chinks between the paving stones, muffled the echo of my steps, I began to be sensible of a strange sound, proceeding from a small building that had been patched on beside the bridge; at first, I took it for the jarring of a shutter shaken by the wind; and then I thought, that noise could only be produced by some vigorous deep-bass snoring. I saw a light at one small window, and stole up to it to peep in. In a low room, two men were seated at a table, with bottles and half emptied glasses before them, and a pack of cards. One of them, huddled into a corner, had fallen asleep. The other sat leaning on his elbows, staring into the light with sleepy swimming eyes, a short pipe between his teeth. Now and then, he caught a fly, and burned

it at the candle, and hardly turned his head when he heard me at the window-pane.

"What's the matter now?" — he called, in a voice worn and hollowed out by drunkenness, — "bid the Mamsell* send our supper, the devil take her!"

Before I could speak, I heard another and a more gentle voice, calling to me across the court: "Who is there? — is a stranger there?" I turned, and at the chief entrance I saw a female figure standing, whom, by the huge bunch of keys she carried at her girdle, I could not err in taking for the housekeeper. She was dressed all in black; all but a tremendous cap, of which the broad bright ribbons fluttered oddly about her delicate faded face.

Taking off my hat to her, I enquired, as politely as I could, while I drew near, whether this really was the castle of Count Ernest ***, and despite the deserted look, whether he might not chance to be at home? I wished to be announced to him as an old friend, although, to be sure, we had not met for years.

The old lady stood looking at me for awhile, with a melancholy searching gaze, and then she said: "This certainly is the castle of the Counts of ***; but my master, whom you seek, you will not find. It is two years since Count Ernest took leave of this place for ever. Perhaps you are not aware that he is settled in Sweden? It is true," she added, after a pause, "the world is very different to these woods; things that will keep sounding in my ears all my lifetime, may be scarcely heard out there. But will you not come in?"

* The title given to all housekeepers in old-fashioned houses. *Die Hausmamsell* is so untranslatable a title in its exact meaning, that I have left it.
Translator's note.

You cannot leave this place to-night, and you must be so kind as to put up with the little we have to offer. It used to be very different; in our hospitable days, guests used to be glad to stay a week. Since the castle has been kept in trust for the two little counts, all has gone to ruin. You have seen, yourself, Sir, the sinful way in which the Forester and Monsieur Pierre kill the time. They clean out nothing but the cellars; and when I say a word of what is needful to be done, the villains turn upon their heels, and I might as well have spoken to the walls. I myself am old, and my eyes get worse and worse, so that I can hardly see to cleanliness and order as I should do. But pray, come in, Sir, and take a bite of something, and talk to me of my dear Count Ernest, of whom now I can only talk to empty rooms and pictures. Your visit will be the greatest favor you can do me."

I still stood on the steps before the great arched door, and felt strangely moved. This old woman's thin quavering voice, and the weary blue eyes with which she looked so sadly on me, increased the dreariness of the place and sharpened the recollections that came crowding over me.

"You are Mamsell Flor," I said, at last; "from whom my friend used to get letters when he was at college; he appeared to be very much attached to you."

At these words her eyes overflowed at once. "Come," she said, and stretched out a slim withered hand; "I see you know me — we are old friends. I have been sadly wanting to see some kind and sympathizing face, once more before I die. It is a long

while to have lived only among servants, for indeed I have been used to better company."

She led me across the dark entrance-hall, and through a vaulted passage to a great hall, dimly lighted by a few candles. Two farm-servants and a maid were seated at a heavy stone table, supping, who stared astonished, when they heard a strange voice wishing them good evening. My companion gave a few whispered orders to the maid, and turned to me again.

"The provisions we have in the house are but poor," she said; "everything we want has to be carried for miles through the woods; and I myself require so little. But for one night, Sir, you will not mind bad cookery. This hall, you see, was once a chapel, in old times, when the counts were Catholic; it was then left some time to dust and ruin, until at last Count Henry, our Count Ernest's father, had the altar, the benches, and the pictures taken away, and an eating room arranged. You can still see the niche for the choristers over there, where the floor is raised and boarded. That is the master's table, at which Count Henry used to sup all his life, with the officials about the place—the steward, the forester, and the castellan, (not Monsieur Pierre then), and the bailiff; and at this stone table I supped with the servants; we had crowds of them then. We never spoke a word, and the count seldom asked a question. When he had company staying with him, the table was laid upstairs in the great saloon, as it always was at dinner, when he dined with the countess. I will just light this candelabrum on the master's table; who knows whether I shall live to see it lighted again?"

She placed a heavy five-branched candelabrum of

massive silver on the table, which she had laid with a snow-white damask cloth, and shortly after, a supper was served up, that might have been far more frugal still, to appear excellent after my long wanderings. Whilst I ate and drank, the old lady disappeared, and left me to my meditations. The men were already gone. I looked up into a twilight depth of desert space, broken by a few tall pointed windows, through which the moonbeams fell. The cross-vaults of the ceiling were supported by square pillars, fretted all over with antlers; and the same ornament was placed at regular intervals along the walls, with a small tablet under each, recording the date of the shot, and the name of the shooter. What changes had the world not seen, from the days when the first high mass was celebrated here, to the present evening, when a stranger sits alone at a deserted table, counting these dust-worn trophies! I took the candelabrum to light myself along while I went reading the names on the little tablets, reaching about two centuries back.

Counts, and princes, and princely prelates; even a few highborn dames had been pleased to immortalize their luck. Presently I came to a well-known name, beneath a stately antler of fourteen:

"On the 20th of September, Count Ernest shot this mighty stag, (who numbers as many antlers as the young count years,) in the glade by the deer's drought; Anno Domini 183—."

Heavy steps now came sounding along the passages, and two men made their boisterous entrance.

I immediately recognised the respectable pair of the watch-tower by the bridge. The farm-servants may

have told them that there was a stranger in the house, and they had shaken themselves out of their drunken sleep, and come to assert their rights as guardians and watchmen. The castellan, Monsieur Pierre, blinking on me with his small yellow much inflamed eyes, measured me from head to foot, with a very comical combination of sleepiness and impudence. He stammered out a few words in a hoarse coarse voice, in very indifferent French, but he was soon talked down by his companion, who walked straight up to me, and in the most brutal tone of official zeal, enquired who I was, and what I wanted?

I drily answered, that I was a friend of Count Ernest's, and had come to see the castle. Upon which straightway a change came over the spirit of the pair. The castellan commenced a series of crouching cat-like obeisances, while the forester contrived to hit on the happiest transition from the most insolent aggressiveness to the respectful bluntness of the honest woodman. I perceived that I was taken for a far more important personage than I was — for an emissary — (no less!) — from the family, come to hold an impromptu inspection of the castle and its condition. The forester, officiously relieving me from the candlestick, forced me into a seat again, and sent a man to the cellar, for a bottle of the best and oldest; while, with a sly kick, or a smothered imprecation, he made an occasional attempt to awaken his drowsy colleague to the full gravity of the situation. However I did not care to be initiated into the details of the administration of woods and buildings, and I felt so much disgusted with the voluble servility of this precious pair of rogues, that I broke off suddenly, as soon as the old lady returned to the hall, and excusing myself with the

natural fatigue of a pedestrian, I begged her to light me to my room.

She cast a look of meaning on the two, who were hardly to be prevented from following us upstairs.

"Did you see the face Monsieur Pierre made at me, sir? and how the forester took up his knife? Of course they are afraid that I should tell of them. Good Lord! as if one could not see with half an eye the state the place is in! I did once write about it to Sweden; but Sweden is a long way off; too long, it would appear, for things to be remedied in this castle. When one has seen it in better days, one feels the worm that eats through wood and silk, gnawing at one's very heart, Sir!"

"It is high to climb;" she apologised, as we came to the third steep flight of stairs, "but I thought I would put you here, as you might like to sleep in the rooms in which Count Ernest grew up to be the man he is, and which he always preferred to any others. And they are more comfortable too, for I look after them myself, and carefully dust out every corner. And to-morrow morning, when you awake, you can see his favorite tree by the window; it has grown up so high meanwhile, that by reaching out your hand you can lay hold of it. Ah, and well a day! when we live to be so old, we live to see many a young child, and many a young tree, grow up and reach to Heaven, and leave us wearily to climb after them!"

With these words, we came to the top, where a long low corridor ran past a range of garret rooms, hardly above man's height. A covey of newly fledged bats, scared by the light, were flapping about against the ceiling. "There must be a hole somewhere in the

roof;" said the old lady looking up, with a shake of her head; "I have told the man to mend it ten times and more. But he always pretends he can find no hole, and thus it is with every thing."

She opened a door, and shewed me into a large low room, where a light was burning on a chifionier, and where the atmosphere was purer and more lifelike than without.

"Here we are;" she said. "Here he lived until he went on his travels with Monsieur Leclerc, and then again before he went to college; and also the last time he was here. Everything is just as it used to be. That faded tapestry with the great hunting pieces may have faded a trifle more; and the writing-table there, with the brass mountings, by the window—the wood-worm is making sad havoc of it. Every time I come, I find above an inch of yellow dust to sweep away. That is his own pretty blue water-bottle; and the gilded glass was a present from his tutor. I worked that little rug before the bed, to give him when he was confirmed, and he never would allow it to be removed, long after the work was quite worn away. The bed is not his; I took his down stairs;" and, with a faint flush, that brought back a touching tint of youth to her refined old face, she added: "in that I sleep myself."

"Indeed, my dear Mamsell Flor," I said; "and he was worthy of being loved by a heart so faithful. He bore the stamp of his most ingenuous soul so clearly upon his noble brow, that even those who merely saw him pass, could not choose but believe all good of him. By the time I knew him he had become reserved; but what must he have been to you, who reared him from his birth, and were to him as a mother! What happened

to make him give up this place, and leave a home for ever, that used to be so dear to him?"

She shook her head sadly, and sat down upon the sofa, as if the weight of all these rushing memories at once, were too heavy to be borne standing. She remained a while absorbed in thought; and then at last, taking an agate snuffbox from her pocket, she strengthened herself with a pinch, before she answered.

"It is a strange story, Sir, which nobody can tell so well as I can; and I may tell it now, that the grass is growing over many a younger head than this old foolish one of mine. It will be nine-and-forty years at Christmas, since I went up these stairs for the first time. I was the schoolmaster's daughter, a silly green young thing, and I thought I was being taken straight to Heaven, when our gracious Countess first took me into her service as a waiting maid. The young Count was not born then, nor ever likely to be: there was little love between my master and my mistress. To be sure my lady would always have been willing to worship him, for all he did to vex her. But they were an illmatched pair; and when Count Henry, who was almost always travelling about, came home in Autumn for the shooting-season, he managed to make his pretty patient wife still more unhappy than when he was away.

"I had not been two days in the castle, before I knew that my lady was suffering from some sore trouble; I used to find her pillow wet of mornings, and her eyes all swollen with crying.

"For you see, Sir, the count was a gentleman who had a quick temper and a wild way of his own, and the countess was meekness itself; she was too quiet for him, and he soon wearied of her. — I suppose he had

only married her to please his father; some wilful, imperious, dark-eyed lady would have done better for him; some Frenchwoman, or Spaniard, such as often came to visit at the castle; who would have kept him at his wits' end, and made him hate her mortally to-day, and love her desperately to-morrow. He only loved what gave him trouble; he rode the wildest horses, and shot the biggest stags.

"Our countess loved him far too well, and that was her misfortune — and our young count was exactly like her, and that was his. Only she was small-made and delicate, and had a voice like the clearest bell. When at last, after many long years of waiting, she had hopes of being a mother, she looked like some fair angel; her joy was shining so peacefully in her eyes! And the count seemed kinder, and even stayed here all the summer, to be present at the baby's birth. When the nurse brought it to him, so small and weakly looking, with its little yellow down upon its head, he said nothing, but put it back into its cradle, and left the room without a word.

"I saw that my lady was deeply hurt, and I felt so angry, that I could not keep from saying, half to myself; 'Boys don't come into the world on horseback!' But I repented directly, for my lady heard me, and sent me out of the room. A week after this, she died.

"It was I who had to go and tell my master. He was sitting at the piano, which he played, oh, so beautifully! I could have listened to him for ever. It was early in the morning: he had watched through the night in my lady's ante-chamber, and as she seemed to be rather better, he had just gone upstairs; only instead of going

to bed, he sat down to play, and, while he was playing, she died. He shut down the piano, without changing one feature of his face, and went down stairs to look at his dead wife with the same proud step he always had; and in the outer room, where our little master lay asleep in his cradle, he passed the poor babe as though it were only a dead image, as its poor mother was. When he came out again, he said to me:

“‘A wet-nurse must be found,’ he said; ‘mean-time, Flor, I give the child in charge to you. I hold you responsible for every proper care. —’

“And then he ordered his favorite horse, and rode away, and did not come home till evening.

“Three days after this, they buried our countess in the cemetery of the town. The count went with the funeral on horseback. And I could not help thinking — God forgive me! — there he goes, prancing away like any conqueror, with his poor victim carried after him for his triumph.

“When the ceremony was over, and all the servants were assembled, eating their funeral feast in silence, and I was alone upstairs, sitting by the little one’s cradle, and crying while I was singing him to sleep, in comes my master, stares at the babe a while, and says:

“‘They had to send the nurse away, I hear; — the child would not take to her at all?’ — ‘No, Sir, he wouldn’t.’

“‘It will be hard to find another one to suit, in that little hole of a place. Do you think you could undertake to bring up the child yourself by hand, with milk and water, as they do in France? You are a person I can depend upon — I had rather leave the child to you, than to twenty wet-nurses.’

"I burst out crying, and took my master's hand and kissed it; for when he pleased, he had a way with him, and a voice, that could turn the heart of his bitterest enemies. 'It is well;' he said, and drew away his hand: 'I shall be some time away; you will write to me twice a year about the boy, and I shall give orders that no one shall interfere with you.' That same day he left the castle, and for many a long year we saw no more of him.

"I will not weary you, Sir, by telling everything — how my little master grew up to be a great boy; — although I remember it all as if it were only yesterday; — and many's the lonesome hour I spend thinking over the past, from the first tooth he cut, to the first bird he shot with his little gun. And when I watched him playing in the court with the dogs, or looked after him when he rode out on the bailiff's horse, every muscle as firm and supple as a steel spring, and then that sweet face of his, and that dear little voice — I used to wonder at his father, who could go wandering about in foreign parts, rather than see his child grow up. To be sure, the boy did not take after him at all, except in his love for horses, and field sports. — For the rest, he was just his mother over again, both in face and temper. And so, when his father came and saw him at ten years old, he frowned, and looked as coldly on him as on a stranger. At night my darling asked me: 'Is Papa always so grave-looking, Flor?' And of course, I could not tell him how it was.

"However, by-and-by, things began to mend. The count came every autumn for the shooting season, and grew quite paternal with our boy; — kind or affectionate

he never was. I cannot call to mind that he ever kissed him, or even so much as stroked his cheek.

"But he gave him, on his thirteenth birthday, a small dun pony, with a bushy mane like a thick clothes-brush, and a pretty saddle; and then Count Ernest was taken to ride out with his papa, away through the forests, for whole days, and often to pay visits in the neighbourhood, where the great folks were always pleased to see the boy. Nobody ever dared to say how like his mother he was, for that always vexed the count; in general the countess was never spoken of, and the full length picture of her was hung in a room that was never used. Only her son would go into it now and then; and loved it well! — He often made me talk about his mother. But do you know, Sir, even then he had the sense to see that it was wisest not to mention her to his father. He had found out that even Death had failed to make her dearer to him. And then, he may have seen that it was just the proudest and wildest among the beauties of the neighbourhood, (and there were several then) who attracted his father most. The count amused himself with them all, and was a very different man to what he was at home. And the boy could not make these doings suit with what he had heard of his mother.

"'Poor child!' I thought; 'Pray Heaven you may not get a stepmother who may suit your father better!'

"However, that did not seem to be so likely, and by-and-by, it came to be rumoured, that the count never intended to marry again at all. He had his loves in Paris, where he always spent the winter, and would not give them up. Of course, Count Ernest never heard a word of this; he was as innocent as any girl could be;

and not even that horrid creature, Monsieur Pierre, — who was then the count's own man, and used to think it a good joke to make an honest woman blush by his loose talk, — even he would affect propriety before the boy.

“A sly fox he was, and knew how to accommodate himself to every one. For the rest, he was a country lad from these parts, and his name was Peter; but after he had been to Paris we never ventured to hint at that. He went every where with the count, and was indispensable to him — He was terribly afraid of him, and worshipped him as a god; — but he robbed him always.

“And now just fancy, Sir! — when our young master was about twelve years old, the count had almost determined on giving him this wretch as a sort of tutor, and asked me what I thought of it? The boy must first learn French, he said, before he began his other studies. I felt as shocked as though he had thought of poisoning the child; and so I took heart and spoke up, and told my master plainly what I thought of Monsieur Pierre, and I said I had rather lose my place than stay to see such disgraceful doings.

“The count let me have my say, and was not a bit angry. He only motioned me to go, and never said another word about the matter. But when he came home in the following September, he brought a stranger with him, whom he presented to us as our young master's tutor. We called him Mr. Leclerc, though that was not his real name; he was a nobleman in needy circumstances, who had been glad to find a decent living — otherwise a harmless gentleman enough, who, to the very last day of his life, never could learn one word

of German, so that we, all of us, soon picked up enough French to speak it fairly. —

“He had some little talents, which he used to teach the young count; such as, dancing, fencing, and playing the flute; and then they read some books together; but Master Ernest once told me with a laugh, that before they had read three pages, Monsieur Leclerc would fall asleep, and leave him to read on to himself till the great clock struck, when he would wake up with a start, and shake the powder from his sleeve, which he had sprinkled over with it while he was nodding, and say; ‘Eh! bien, c’est ça!’ and then he would fall asleep again. One thing he used to be very busy with; and that was a knack he had, of modelling little figures in pink wax; and he would paint them and varnish them so prettily that they really looked like life — little marquises and viscounts. He had a whole court of them, and would make them dance minuets, while a sweet little queen was sitting on a throne, looking on. Afterwards I heard from Count Ernest that he had taken into his head that Marie Antoinette had been in love with him; he was as old as that, although he used to go tripping about like any dancing master.

“But here I am, running on, sir, telling you all this nonsense, and you wanting to go to sleep! — Yes, when once I begin, I can find no end; and indeed there is not a chair in the castle but could tell ever so long a story of its own.

“Just there, where you are sitting now, sir, I stood one morning, and Master Ernest was sitting here on this very sofa; he had been at a ball for the first time. It had been given at X by the small officials and chief

burghers. He was just sixteen — and quite grown up, although he was slighter than when you knew him. 'Well Count Ernest,' I said; 'and how did you like it? Were there any pretty girls? And whom did you dance with? And who got your posy at the cotillion?'

"'Flor;,' he said; he always called me Flor, and I was also the only person, until he married, to whom he ever used the 'thou' — 'Flor, it was all very pleasant; and one there was most pleasant —'

"His eyes were sparkling, and he looked at me in a kind of shy pretty way I had never seen in him before — he even blushed a little.

"'Come come;,' I said, 'Master Ernest, you make me curious — was it one of the young ladies who had been invited, or one of the townspeople's daughters?'

"'I am not going to betray myself any farther, Flor;,' he said; 'but she was very pretty and very wise, and talked so pleasantly, I only wish we were going to have another ball to-night!'

"'Why, that sounds quite alarming, Master Ernest,' I said, and laughed — 'to stay up all night dancing and go riding all the morning, and then to want more dancing! Our gracious count will be quite pleased! And is this really to be your last word, and all your faithful Flor is to be allowed to hear?'

"'My very last word, Flor; it is my own secret, and I mean to keep it.'

"'I must get hold of Mr. Leclerc, then;,' I said, he will be able to tell me who you danced with oftenest.'

"'Try him, Flor:,' cried the naughty boy; and laughed; 'all my partners were the same to him;

only — “jeunes Allemandes, jolies bourgeoises!” — he looked after my pas, and never minded where my eyes went; besides, he played écarté all the evening with the director of the salt works. Ah! Flor, I never thought there could be such sweet eyes in the world; I used to think that your two were the sweetest!”

“You see, sir, this was what I got for all my pains and my anxiety!

“But this merry mood of his did not last. Next day he grew quiet and thoughtful, avoided all my questions, and shut himself up in his room at an unusually early hour; and then I heard him playing the flute for ever so long after. He could not get this girl out of his head — I saw that. At first he had felt no more than a pleasant smart, as it were, and could joke about it; but the fever followed. He could not hold out four-and-twenty hours, but he ordered his horse and rode out alone, returning at night quite cast down. It was plain that he had not seen his flame, and had been too shy to find her out and pay her a visit. And so he rode to X several times over, with more or less good luck. One night, when his heart was full, he could not refrain from telling me his adventure, as I was lighting him upstairs to bed. His face was radiant; but Good Lord! to any other man, it would not have been worth the telling; Count Henry would only have said, ‘Pshaw!’ — but to him it was a rare delight. Just at the gates he had met her, out walking with two of her young companions, and all three of them had roses in their hands. Just as he rode by, and bowed, his horse had given a jump, and the young lady had been so startled that she dropped a rose: ‘I saw it,’ said Master Ernest, ‘and in a moment I was out of my

saddle, and had picked it up and given it her; and she thanked me very kindly, and walked away towards the woods.'

"'And you rode on, and the lady did not even give you a rose for your reward? Any other man would have picked up the flower, and stuck it in his button-hole, and galloped off in triumph.'

"He looked at me, and seemed quite struck; 'Flor,' says he; 'I do believe you know more of these things than I, although you are a woman.'

"'More likely, *because* I am a woman, Master Ernest,' I said. 'Well, well, I see, the young lady is badly off for mother-wit, or else she can't abide you.'

"Of course I was only joking; for how could I think the girl existed who would not like him? But for all that, it made him silent, and I saw that he really thought she did dislike him.

"Only once again did he ride over to X, and after that he stayed at home, and was quite downhearted; he spoke to nobody, but sat in his room writing — verses, as I believe, — and played the flute, and pined away so, that when Count Henry came back, he was quite angry about his looks, and scolded him, and told him he did not take exercise enough, and he asked me if Count Ernest had been ailing? That he had a heart-ache I did not like to say — he never would have forgiven me, and Count Henry would have laughed. At last it was decided that our young count was to travel for a time with Mr. Leclerc, and both of them seemed to like the plan. 'Flor,' said my boy, 'it is well that I leave this place. Life is become wearisome to me.'

"'God bless you, my dearest boy,' I said; 'the world is so beautiful, they say, that I suppose one can't long be sad in travelling.'

"He looked at me with an unbelieving smile; but afterwards he wrote to me from Vienna, that he was well, and often thought of me. God knows! I thought of him, day and night.

"I did not get a sight of him again for three long years, and when he wrote to me from the great cities where he went to court, among all the fine folks — he will get properly spoiled, I thought, as befits his rank. I shall not know him again. But just the contrary; when he came back at last in his twentieth year, without Mr. Leclerc, who had died in Russia of the climate, the very first word he spoke: 'Flor,' says he, 'and how is Miss Mimi?' — That was a cat I had, Sir, of whom he used to be almost jealous, as a child.

"'Returns thanks for kind enquiries, Master Ernest,' I said; 'she has just kittenened, and will be delighted, as we all are, to see your honour back again.'

"'I am afraid it is a delight that won't last long, Flor,' he said; and at night, when I was lighting him to bed, as I always did, he told me all about it; how he had done his father's bidding, and been to see the great world, and he had seen enough of it to find it terribly tedious; and now he had had some trouble in carrying his point, which was to go and study alone for a year or two. 'It was a shame,' he said, 'the confusion that was in his brain.' I could only stare at this, for to me he seemed a man in all things, and cleverer, I thought, it was not possible to be, when I heard him talk with others. But he knew best, of course, and I did not contradict him then; for there

were other things I was more curious to know. I asked him about the life he had been leading, and whether the fine ladies he had been dancing with, were handsomer than the daughters of our townspeople? And look you, Sir, at this, he turned as red as a boy;—he, the accomplished fine-grown gentleman, who had just come from living among the fine folks;—and he only said: ‘Some perhaps, not many;’ and so I saw that old love does not always rust. The very next day he rode over to the town; I suppose to make enquiries, and find out whether she were still unmarried. Of course, I did not know, for I had never heard who she was. When he came back, in the evening, he looked very grave. ‘It is all over,’ I said to myself, ‘and all the better that it is so; what could have ever come of it?’

“Between him and his father things were no better than they used to be. When I helped to wait at table, I saw that the count was always ready for a quarrel with his son, who could never say or do a single thing to please him. He seemed provoked to be, in a manner, forced to respect the lad, who never by any chance forgot himself, but only quietly defended his own opinion, or held his tongue. Just as the blessed countess had always done, and the count was not fond of being reminded of her. Nothing would have pleased him better than to see his son just such another bold bird of prey as he himself still was, for all his half century. Never had he found a horse too wild, a woman too witty, or a sword too sharp for him. He could not forgive the boy for being so modest. Indeed I often thought—God forgive me!—that he had rather have seen Count Ernest forget his duty to him as his father, if he only would have forgotten that the countess was

his mother. Therefore the count always went back to talk of the good old times, when the world was merrier and less particular. Now it was only a world for sneaks and lubbers. And when he had drunk a glass beyond the common, he would tell us all sorts of love-adventures he had had when he was young; while the young count would look straight before him, and hold his peace. I was horrified to hear him, and said to myself: 'Can a father really find it in his heart to be the tempter of his son, when he finds his innocence a reproach to him?'

"To be sure, I knew that was not the way to tempt my boy at all; he did not even lose the respect he owed him as a father. Only it grieved him sadly, never to see the slightest sign that his father loved him; that I saw by his eyes; but he never spoke about it, not even to me, to whom he generally told everything. And so I was almost glad when he left us in a week to go to College, and never once came home for the next five years; much as he loved his home, and his woods, and everything about the place, and often as he used to enquire after them in his letters.

"I say, I was almost glad, and was more glad presently.

"The young count may have been away for about three years, when I fell into a bad illness; and that left me a weakness in my limbs, so that I could hardly drag myself up and down the stairs. For I kept all the keys, and nobody but Mamsell Flor ever touched a thing in the cellars, store-rooms, or plate-chests. When the count came home in the autumn, and saw me crawling about the house with a stick; 'Flor,' he said, 'you have been doing too much for your strength; you must

have some assistance; a sort of housekeeper under you, to save you going up and down the stairs.' So kind he was, you see, sir, in some things; and for all I could say against it, next day, it appeared in the daily papers, that a housekeeper was wanted at the castle.

"All sorts of women came, but none to please me. One or two among them I even suspected of coveting a higher place, (or a lower, as one takes it) than that of housekeeper; for the count was known to be a gallant gentleman. I was rather pleased that none of them could be found to suit; I was always too particular, and none of them did things as I liked to have them done. And so we had nearly forgotten that we had wanted one, when one afternoon, in comes a tall slight young woman, in deep mourning, with very weary eyes. She had come two days' journey from a town where her father and mother, one after the other, had lately died, and left her entirely unprovided for. Her father had been a functionary of some importance, and had lived upon his pay. Her only brother was an engineer, and was now employed in England on a railway, which he could not leave without the sacrifice of all his prospects. She had therefore written to him not to mind her; she had found a situation in a noble family, and was well provided for; meaning if she were not accepted here, to take even a lower place.

"Although everything I could learn about the poor child was entirely satisfactory, and though she passed the severest examination I could think of in household matters, I felt a something in my heart, that warned me not to take her. I told her plainly I thought it might not be for her good. I said she was too young, and what more I could think of. And just as she was

going, quite submissively, without any prayers or tears, I called her back, and kept her after all. In fact I was only afraid she might please the count too well, for she was as fine a girl as you could see, with a splendid figure, and a high-bred face like nobody else's; and then such a weight of long brown hair, that could reach three times round her head. But I found that she had a grave decided way with her, and that she was not easily to be put upon. And besides, Count Henry was just then over head and ears in love, as Mr. Pierre had whispered, with a singer he had met in London, and had only broken from her chains for a short time, to hasten back to them as fast as ever he could. So he did not take much notice of the stranger, when she took her place at the servants' table for the first time; he just glanced at her from head to foot, gave an approving nod, and sat all the evening alone, at the master's table, playing with his ring, and letting the beautiful green stone glitter at the light, and Mr. Pierre told us it was a present from his London friend. And I suppose it was true, for when he came back next year, the ring was gone, and Mr. Pierre told us strange stories about it, which you will not care to hear, sir.

"When the count first saw the girl again, Mamsell Gabrielle, as she was called, I watched his face attentively as she walked across the hall. He looked much as he used to do, when the dealers brought him horses, and he had them trotted out into the yard. But he treated her just as he did the rest of us, only that he spoke to her less often. She had begun to bloom again, in the quiet life here among the woods, and with the exercise she took when she was busy about

the house. She had left off mourning, and sometimes I even heard her singing in the little garden she had laid out with her own hands in the moat, that we might have our vegetables more handy.

"In this, as in everything else, she was clever, quiet, and independent; I may say I got to love her dearly, and thought we never should be able to do without her; and yet we had done so long! — We used to sit together for many a pleasant hour, spinning and chatting. I used to talk to her of my dear Count Ernest, and read his letters to her, and when Count Henry was at home, we would stand at the window till late at night, listening to his beautiful playing, and to the nightingales singing. Then she would tell me how her childhood had been passed, and of the happy life she had led when her parents were alive, and how well off they had been; and also about her brother; and she spoke of all this without any bitterness, and so I saw that she was quite contented; and that the longer she lived among us, the more she liked us.

"And now, for the first time, I was glad when the winter came, and we were snowed up again by ourselves. When the count was here, we had no peace; though he only received gentlemen, and was particular about these. To be safe from the ladies of the neighbourhood, he had left all the roads without repair, save only a few bridle paths. But it did not come at all as I expected. The count did not leave the castle, and Mr. Pierre insinuated that it was because he had never been able to forget that faithless love of his, and therefore preferred to live in solitude. I could not get this idea into my stupid old head, for I knew my master too well to believe that he could be so long

cast down, for such an amour as that. However, stay he did, and the winter came, and snowed us up; and with us, the count and Mr. Pierre.

"How he managed to get through those long winter-days, is more than I can tell; for he never had been fond of his book. We could hear him playing on the piano out of his own head for hours together, and then he used to take long rides into the woods, and it was fine to see him come home, riding in a cloud of smoke from the nostrils of his snorting horse, his beard all tinkling with icicles, and his grand proud face colored by the frosty air. He had always been a handsome man, and if his hair was getting a trifle thinner and more grey, his eyes looked all the darker and more fiery. He must have found a sweetheart in this neighbourhood, I thought, but we heard nothing; not even in this dull place, where we could hear the leaf fall; market-women and butter-women took care of that. Visits or invitations there were none. I used to shake my head, and Mr. Pierre, who had been used to a gayer life, shook his. He had never dreamed that the count would hold out so long as Christmas.

"*'Mamsell Flor,'* he said; *'il y a du mystère, as sure as my name is Pierre!'* and he would whistle the Marseillaise and wink; but in fact, the rogue knew nothing. To pass the time, he took it into his head to make love to Mamsell Gabrielle, but he soon let that alone. For modest as she was, yet she had a way of throwing back her head at times, you would have thought she was a duchess, and he found out that it was none of his Paris sewing women he had to deal with. Something French he must have, and so he took to the Bordeaux wine in our cellars, and often he was

so drunk that he could not wait at table. But his master never said a word to him. The count was more gentle than he used to be; he never said an angry word, and at Christmas he made each of us a present. With the new year he took to dining downstairs in the hall, and of an evening he came early, and sat reading the newspapers all alone, at the master's table. But he did not like us to be silent; on the contrary, after supper, he made us stay and sing. The second forester had a fine bass voice, and Mamselle Gabrielle could sing like the very wood witch herself. We often sat up till past eleven, and it sounded beautifully in the echo of the great hall. Many a time I saw the count drop the paper, and listen pensively, with his head leaning on his hand. But I always kept thinking of my own dear young count, and what a weary time he had been away; and I used to talk of him to Mamselle Gabrielle, till she sometimes fell asleep; — which made me cross with her.

“For the rest, we were always the best of friends, and it was no small shock to me, when one morning she came to tell me, that she was obliged to give up her place. She did not think the air was good for her; she meant to try another. Well, she had slept very badly, I knew, the night before. She still looked feverish, and her eyes were red; and as often as I called to her, she would begin trembling all over. She might have caught cold, for she had come home late from a walk in the woods the day before, and had gone straight to bed, without coming down to supper. ‘Child,’ I said; — ‘it will pass off. The air of this place is healthy; and where will you find so easy a situation, and so kind a master? — not to speak of my own humble

self.' But the more I talked, the more positive she grew, and I thought I should only make her worse; so I went upstairs to my master, to tell him that Mamselle Gabrielle had just given warning.

"The count heard me out, and then he said: 'Do you know any reason for her going, Flor?' — when I began about her health; — 'What room have you given her?' 'I took her into mine, Sir,' I said; 'Your honor knows the rooms on the first story, just opposite my lady's bedroom; I have slept in them for twenty years and more, and I never found anything unwholesome for one moment.'

"He considered a while, and said: 'If Mamselle Gabrielle chooses to go, of course we can't prevent her, Flor; she is her own mistress. But at least, she shall not say that she lost her health in my service. Your rooms look to the forest, and the west winds come blowing against the windows. It must be damp; and in winter there is not a finger's breadth of sunshine. While Mamselle Gabrielle remains, you will have to give her another room. Put her in those opposite, that look into the court; they have the morning-sun full upon them; and then you may advertise for another situation for her.'

"I stared at him. 'I am to put Mamselle Gabrielle in the appartments where our gracious countess slept?'

"He nodded. 'I will have it so:' he said shortly.

"'But all the furniture is just as it was then;' I went on, without minding his frown. 'How can I give my blessed mistress's things, — her bed and table, and her toilette service — to a stranger?'

"'You can do as I bid you;' he said, very quietly. 'Leave every thing as it stands.'

“‘And if the poor thing gets worse;’ — and I spoke more eagerly; — ‘whom has she at hand to look after her?’

“‘There is only the passage between you;’ he answered. ‘If Mamselle Gabrielle should be unwell, it will be very easy for you to nurse her.’

“He sat down to the piano, and began to play, and so I was obliged to go. And I must say, fond as I was of Mamselle Gabrielle, it cut me to the heart to have to go down-stairs, and air those beautiful appartments, to put a servant in them. For that she was, the same as I was. And moreover, I did not like her face, when I told her what the count had been pleased to order. She first turned white, as if she had been frightened, and then she grew scarlet; she curled her lip half scornfully, and said: ‘Very well; God will not forget me, wherever you may please to put me!’ She took over her little bed with her, and would not put her bits of clothes in those beautiful inlaid drawers, but left them packed in her little trunk, all ready to go. And I liked that of her; and I kissed her, and begged her pardon in my heart, for having so grudged her my lady’s rooms. She sobbed a while on my shoulder, and I had some little trouble in soothing her, but I laid it all upon the fever. That night, I left my door ajar, to hear if she went quietly to sleep; and all *was* quiet till about twelve o’clock. Then, all of a sudden, I thought I heard her talking loud and angrily. I jumped out of bed, and all the time I was feeling for my slippers, I heard her talking on. I could not catch the words till I got into the passage, and then I distinctly heard her say: ‘I am only a poor servant-

girl; but may the walls of this castle fall upon me, and crush me, rather than ...'

"I knocked at the door, — (which she had bolted by my advice), — and screamed out: 'Gabrielle, child! What is the matter? Answer me, for the love of God! Whom are you talking to? — Is the room haunted?' — No answer. I looked through the keyhole — nothing to be seen — I went on knocking and calling, but it was a long time before I could get a wiselike answer. 'Mamsell Flor? is that you? what makes you come so late?' — and presently I heard her unbolting the door.

"She stood before me in the darkness; only the snow gave a faint light from the windows. I took her hand, and felt it trembling and ice-cold. 'What makes you come to me so late, Mamsell Flor?' she said — 'Have I been talking in my sleep? Oh! yes, I am ill; I think I am in a fever; just feel how my limbs are shaking!' And with that, she burst out crying. I got her to bed again as fast as ever I could, and sat up all night with her.

"In the morning she was too ill to rise, and did not get well again for more than a week. The count did not seem much concerned about it, though he sent Mr. Pierre to enquire after her.

"The first time she came downstairs to supper, my master went up to her, and said a few words in a low voice, and then she walked silently and thoughtfully to her seat. And silent and thoughtful she remained, for the matter of that. But she slept quietly of nights, and did her work, as usual, like a pattern. She asked me now and then, whether any answer had been made to our advertisement. Our letters all went through Mr.

Pierre's hands, and he had heard of none. But she seemed in no hurry to go, and I was only too glad to have her stay.

"Spring came, and we were still without my dear young count. Instead of him, there arrived one day a very disagreeable stranger, a gentleman from London — and indeed I don't think that even my master was quite glad to see him. But he did his best to receive him civilly, as was due to an old acquaintance; he rode with him all over the country, and he invited people to play cards with him. They would sit up gambling till daybreak; trying all the wines in the cellar, and never once coming down to the hall.

"This went on for about a fortnight, and glad enough I was when I heard that the English Lord was going away next morning. The last day, they had been to dine at the Baron's, eight miles off; it might be about nine o'clock, when we heard their horses come pattering over the bridge. We were just at supper, and I was getting up to take a candle, and light the gentleman upstairs, but before we could leave the table, they came in. The English gentleman foremost, with that look he had in his eyes when he had just dined. And the count came after him, with his riding-whip under his arm, and his spurs jingling with that heavy tread by which I knew that his spirit was up.

"We all rise, and make our bows and curtsies; the English Lord, keeping his hat upon his head, gives us a sort of condescending nod, and says: 'Devil take long rides, Harry! I feel as stiff as a poker! don't let us go upstairs to-night; let us have our grog down here by the chimney corner — I incline to affability to-

wards these your trusty vassals!' — and he stared from one of us to the other, and never listened to what the count was saying to him in French, in a low voice. All at once he catches sight of Mamsell Gabrielle, and chuckles quite out loud. 'Ha! Harry, old boy!' he cries; 'what an old fox you are! do you keep such doves as these in your hen-house? *Foi de gentilhomme!*' — and he laughed so insolently that I felt the blood rush into my face. 'Let us have this dove at supper, I say, with a good glass of Burgundy: you have plucked it long ago, of course —' and then another great roar of laughter. My very heart stood still — I looked at the poor girl — she was as white as the wall — and my master looked — Sir, I cannot tell you how he looked. He went close up to the Englishman, where he stood laughing, and said out loud: 'You will ask the young lady's pardon, sir, this moment — and then you will leave the room. I can protect my people from the insolence of any man, be he who he may!'

"The Lord did not seem to hear him, and kept staring at the girl. 'By Jove!' he said, speaking thick with drink; 'deuced neat built she is! and I have been in the house a week and more, and never yet — Ah! Harry — I say — d—d sly old fox is Harry. Come, dear, don't let me frighten you.' And he stretched out his arm to take her round the waist, while the poor thing stood motionless against the wall, as if she had been struck by lightning — when we heard a sharp sound whistling through the air, and with a great oath the Lord drew back his hand. The count had drawn a broad red stripe across it with his riding-whip.

"Sir, I need not tell you all that passed that night;

only, that by seven o'clock next morning my master had fought the stranger, without seconds, at a place they call the wolf's gap. We heard the crack of the four shots in the still February morning, and half an hour afterwards, the count came home bleeding from his left hand. He did not send for a surgeon, but had it bound up by his valet, Mr. Pierre, who had been with him on the ground, and told us that the Lord had not come off so easily; but he had been able to get on horseback and ride on to the next town.

"What that poor thing, — Gabrielle, — said to it all? Good Lord! She held her peace, as if she had really been turned to stone that evening — and what surprised me rather — she never thought of going to thank her master for what he had done; but she never talked of leaving now.

"From that morning when we heard the shots, she was so changed, I should scarcely have known her. She went through her work as usual, and was neither glad nor sad, only absent; so absent, that of an evening she would sit for hours, staring into the light, as if she were in a trance — and I must say these strange ways became her; she grew handsomer from day to day. We every one of us noticed it. As to the younger functionaries about the place, there was not a single man of them, who was not over head and ears in love with her. But she never seemed to see it — and not one of them had a kinder word to boast of than the others.

"Summer came, and brought no change. The count was still at the castle; Mr. Pierre sitting with his bottle before him half the day; and every body wondering and conjecturing what was likely to come of this

new style of living. The busy tongues had a fresh match ready every week for my Master. For he had got to be far gayer; he willingly accepted invitations in the neighbourhood, and even gave little fêtes in return, where he was all politeness. I had never known him to be in such a humour before, and I thanked God for it; the more, as we expected our young count to come home in the Autumn, and it would have broken my heart if they had not met in peace and kindness.

“And oh! Sir, that night, when my Count Ernest came, and his father rode out to meet him — (he came from Berlin, after having passed his examination most brilliantly) — I felt — his own mother could not have felt more. And when I saw him, so tall and handsome, riding beside his father through the triumphal arch of fir-trees the men had put up for him across the bridge — and the lovely transparency over the gate, with the word: ‘Welcome!’ and Mr. Pierre’s rockets whizzing right up into the sky, I burst into tears, and could not speak a word — I only took his hand, and kept kissing it again and again. —

“And he was just the same as ever; and he stroked my face, and had his old jokes with me, that were only between us two. Ah! Sir, that was a pleasant meeting! The count — I mean the father — walked upstairs with his son, looking quite pleased and proud; and indeed it was a son to be proud of. I felt so cross with Mamsell Gabrielle, when I asked her what she thought of our young count, and found she could not tell me whether he were dark or fair. But when I came to consider of it, I said to myself that, after all, this was better than falling in love with him — for that was what I had

always been afraid of. — Poor shortsighted creatures that we are!

“In the evening I was called upstairs, to help to wait upon the gentlemen, who had their supper in Count Henry’s room. Monsieur Pierre’s fireworks had so heated him, that he was not to be got out of the cool cellars that night at all; and I was only too happy to take his place, and have a good look at my young count. But my pleasure was soon spoiled, for the count his father soon began to talk again, as he used to do, of the good old times. ‘The young folks of the present day,’ he said, ‘are fit for nothing but to sit by the chimney-corner, with their noses on their books — worse still, to write themselves — even for the daily papers.’ I don’t remember all he said — only some things that appeared to me the worst — some things I shall not forget to my dying-day.

“You must know, Sir, that when Count Henry had been a half-grown lad, he had been taken to Paris by his father, just when the Empire was at its height; and as the old count (grand-father to our Count Ernest) had always been of those to whom Napoleon was as a god, of course they met with the best reception. The old count had been at Paris before, for some years during the revolution; and most of those bad bloody men had been his friends; and Count Henry began to talk of these. ‘Do you suppose,’ he said, ‘that the Emperor could have fought these battles with our good bourgeois of the present day? Wild beasts those were he had to tame, and to let loose upon his enemies. There was a scent of blood in the very air of Paris then, that was withering to the sicklier plants; and turned the weaker spirits faint. But to a resolute

man, the sulphureous atmosphere proved intoxicating. He would have dared a thousand devils. And as the men, so the women; all had tasted blood — and blood makes brighter eyes than household dust. Just look at our present world,' — he said — 'our German world at least — compared to that! all so prim, precise, and regular, like the straight lines of a Dutch garden. Fathers, schoolmasters, and wise professors are there to trim it, and if anything escapes them, there is the police. If ever the brute begins to shew itself in man, — in civilized man — quick comes the police with a summons to expel it; but the beast is not to be expelled — it must have blood — if not in pailfuls, at least in drops — it will turn sneakingly domestic, and suck it from the veins of its nearest neighbour. Out upon the small sly social vices of the day! they are so shabby! — worse: — they are so stupid! — see what they will do for this puny generation when a time for action comes — for great deeds to be done by thorough men, and genuine mettle. When a man says he shrinks from shedding blood, and would not crush a worm, I say it is his own blood he is so chary of, and shrinks from shedding. At that time Death was the Parisian's familiar, — his bosom friend; together they fought and won the Emperor's great victories.' And then my master went on to talk of a ball where his father had been; they called it 'le bal des Zéphirs,' because it was given on a spot which had been a churchyard — I forget the name of the church. And just above the skull and cross-bones upon the gateway, they had put up a transparency with the inscription: 'Le bal des Zéphirs;' and they had danced like mad upon the graves and tombstones, till morning.

"All this time, my dear young count sat grave and silent, opposite his father, whose discourse, I could plainly see, appeared as blasphemous to him, as it did to me; but he spoke very calmly, and beautiful were the things he said: — 'Man has progressed since then,' he said; 'it requires more energy to build up than to destroy.' In his opinion: 'a world without a sense of veneration must necessarily decay and fall in pieces, like a building without cement;' and more of the like which I have forgotten, more's the pity; but when he spoke, I used rather to watch his eyes, than mind his lips! His eyes would grow so clear, you could look right through them. Only one thing more I recollect; he said: 'A generation that can dance on the graves of its fathers, will assuredly care little for its children; a man who tramples upon the past, is unworthy of a future —'

"As these words escaped him, he turned red and stopped short, — fearful lest his father should be offended by them. But, bless you, he was not used to mind such trifles!

"'Bah!' says he: 'we are all the same — only we are quieter; we do the same things, only not to the sound of fifes and trumpets — we have no piping to our dancing. In every generation man is selfish, and has a right to be. There was another kind of ball in those days, they called it *le bal des victimes*. When the Convention had confiscated the property of the guillotined, it was returned to their heirs, after the 9th Thermidor. Thus many of them held their lands, *par la grace de Robespierre*. Young men began to live fast again, and to enjoy themselves. They gave balls where only those were admitted who could prove that

some very near relation had been beheaded; it was a sort of herald's office to the scaffold; and to shew their gratitude for their inheritance, they invented a peculiar mode of salutation. A gentleman would go up to a lady, and jerk his head forwards, as if he dropped it, and the lady would do the same. They called it *Salut à la victime*; and all this with fiddling and dancing, and wax-lights and champagne. I do not admire that style of thing myself; it was a fashion like any other, and not a pretty one, I think; but I really do see no improvement in young people's babbling of the sanctity of family ties, and of their duty to their fathers, and forefathers, and sighing in secret for their turn to come, even if without the connivance of a Robespierre.'

"I left the room, for I could not hear him speak in such a way, to such a son. I waited in the ante-chamber till Count Ernest came out to go to bed. He was sad and silent, and would have passed without noticing me, but I took up my light, and followed him. In the passage he suddenly stopped and looked eagerly up the staircase, that was well lighted with a two-branched lamp. 'What now?' thinks I—and then I saw Mamsell Gabrielle coming down from the loft with some plate she had been to fetch, and pass us on her way downstairs. When she had quite disappeared; 'Who is that, Flor?' says he, quickly turning to me—'Who is that lady?'

"When I told him, he shook his head. 'Can it be the same?' he murmured, 'or can I be so far mistaken?' And then after a while, when I had come into his room with him: 'Flor,' he said, 'I am right; she was only on a visit to X, when she was at that ball, and she

left it again soon after. *Both* parents did you say? — and so poor, — so friendless — that she was forced to go to service? —

“‘She wants for nothing here;’ I said, to pacify him; for then I saw at once that she was that old flame of his, for whom he had pined so long. ‘My dear young master,’ I said, ‘she could never be better off than she is here. His honor is very kind to her, and will have her treated with the greatest consideration and respect.’

“But he did not seem to hear me; he was sitting there in that great arm-chair by the open window — thinking, and thinking, till he made me feel quite nervous. He appeared to be so troubled in his mind, as all the past came over him, and all that he thought he had forgotten.

“The old rooms again; the tapestry with the hunting scenes; the furniture he had seen from his childhood; the dark woods before the windows, and then his father’s horrid talk — if he forgot his poor old Flor a while, I am sure I could not wonder. I was about to steal quietly away and leave the room, when he saw me, and rising, he came and laid his two hands upon my shoulders:

“‘Flor,’ he said: ‘if it should really come to pass — which is more than I dare to hope — what a wonderful, — delightful dispensation it would be!’

“‘If *what* should come to pass?’ says I; for fond as I was of the girl, the idea that she could ever become our gracious countess was a thing I never could have dreamed of. ‘Let us leave it all to Providence, Flor,’ he said, very seriously. ‘Good night, Flor —’

“And with that, he went to the window again, and

I to my lonely room, where, for all it was so quiet, I could not fall asleep for hours.

"And so, next morning I overslept myself, and was quite ashamed when I saw the bright sun shining in at my window. My room just looked over the vegetable beds that Mamsell Gabrielle had laid out; and I saw her busy among them, cutting what was needed for the table. I was just going to call to her, and tell her how long I had been sleeping, when I saw Count Ernest coming out of the wood, and going towards the little garden. He bowed to her, and I saw how she stood up, and returned his bow with due respect, but quite naturally — not an idea of recognition — not even when he spoke to her; — nothing of the awkwardness of recollecting that her former partner now stood before her as her master. He appeared more embarrassed than she was. And as they crossed the garden, side by side, I could not help thinking to myself, if God should so appoint it, a handsomer pair could not be found in all the world. I was quite willing that the poor child should have all that happiness and honor, if she only made my boy as happy as he deserved to be.

"But you know, sir, 'man proposes, and God disposes,' as the proverb says, and I soon found out.

"I had not looked after them long, when Mr. Pierre came running to tell Count Ernest that his father was wanting him immediately — and soon after they rode away together; and indeed, sir, it was quite a sight to see that handsome father on his wild black horse, and the slender son riding a light brown Arab mare, as they galloped over the bridge into the wood. Mr. Pierre said they had been invited to the Baron's: there they

had cast their hooks in haste for the son, when they found the father could not be made to bite; and indeed the three baronesses had not much time to lose; but 'they reckon without the host,' thinks I.

"As for Mamsell Gabrielle, I could not get much out of her. Many years ago she had been in X, on a visit to a friend, and there she had danced with our young master. It was plain that he had been so bashful, that she had no idea of the impression she had made; she talked of him as of any other young man. This made me cross, I must confess; but to be sure, it was all quite right, and far better so; and I resolved to have no hand whatever in the business, and neither by word or hint, to meddle with it, but to leave it entirely to Providence.

"When the gentlemen came back that night, I had a good long talk with my young count at last. He was very merry. He described the foolish dressed-up ways of these three lemon-colored baronesses, who in those last five years had grown so young and bashful, so girlish and so giggling; and had pouted so prettily at his father for being so bad a neighbour, hinting at their hopes that the son might make amends; and so, with one eye upon the father, and the other upon the son, altogether the attraction had been rather 'louche.'

"'Ah! Flor,' he said, 'it was just the thing to make me sick of the so-called proper matches. I half suspect my father to have taken me there on purpose to warn me from the daughters of the country, and make me feel the value of my liberty; he knows how I hate the thoughts of going to Stockholm, where they want to send me with the Legation. I had so far rather stay at home among my woods, and only be a sports-

man, or a farmer. And you, Flor, you faithful soul, you would never bid me go. But when I just hinted at my wishes, treating them as a sort of romantic whim, I saw at once that by staying I should lose the last remnant of my father's good opinion; and indeed I have no occasion' — he said, with a faltering in his voice, that made my heart ache terribly — 'I have no occasion to put his affection to too hard a test. After all, Flor, one has but one father, in this world.'

"Poor boy, it was the first time he ever shewed how much it grieved him to be so little loved.

"My darling Count Ernest,' I said; 'you know how I wish you all your heart desires; but to live here in this solitude, at your age, one had needs be wonderfully happy, or desperately wretched.'

"And which was your case, Flor?' he asked.

"I was happy,' I said; 'for I had a dear little master to bring up, who never for a moment let me feel that I was not his own mother, but only a penniless servant-girl.'

"He took my hand, and said; 'Right, you dear old woman! but if to live here, one must needs have everything one wishes, or nothing, why should I despair of having everything?'

"I held my tongue, for I did not dare to begin first to speak of what he might be thinking needful to his happiness. He guessed what I was thinking of, for he said:

"To be sure, even if the greatest of all gifts were within my reach, who knows whether I should be allowed to take it? Curious, how men contradict themselves! There is my father now, who never goes to court, because, he says, the nobility of to-day has no-

thing thorough-bred about it, if it be not in the stables. Yet how would he look, if I were to go and propose giving him a daughter who was only a blameless girl, who had been his servant? But I am talking nonsense. It is not likely that I shall be tempted to make such a proposal.'

"The safest way not to be tempted, is to go abroad;' I said, at last, as he sat silent and discouraged. 'For, my dear Count Ernest, if Mamsell Gabrielle appears to have no eyes for her young master, I am certain it is only because she is a servant girl, and knows what she is about. It would be a thousand pities for the poor child, if she were to suffer her heart to escape her through her eyes, for there would be no recalling it. I know her well: she has a brave spirit of her own; if she were to say: — "I will do this, if I were to die for it," — she *would* do it and die, without a word.'

"God knows, I found it hard to say all this to my darling boy, and moreover, presently I found that I had only been making matters worse.

"He had never hoped that the girl could love him, but now he interpreted her reserve more favorably; he thought it might be forced — in self-defence — to enable her to stand more firm; and that perhaps she suffered from it no less than he did. And indeed I thought the same. I, too, thought her changed since Count Ernest had been at home; she had grown graver and more absent. I often saw her sweet face change from white to red, without any sufficient cause. I meant to speak to my young count at the very first opportunity, and entreat him to come to some decision; to settle it one way or the other. But the opportunity did not

come of itself, and I wanted heart to seek one. I loved him dearly, and it was hard for me to part with him so soon.

"And so a week passed, and then a fortnight, and three whole weeks, and the evil was growing daily before my eyes; and other eyes saw it too. At least I heard from Mr. Pierre, that the two counts had been talking of Stockholm again. Count Henry had insisted on Count Ernest's going at once, and Count Ernest had begged for time to think about it. After that the father had taken care that they should be out all day, so that his son should find no time for the handsome Mamsell Gabrielle. 'C'est drôle,' says Mr. Pierre, the cunning creature; 'if my master were in love with the girl himself, he could not be more careful of her; but I would lay my life, that he has not the shadow of a liaison with her. It would be the first time he ever undertook such a thing, without my help; and how could he? — in this castle all over ears and eyes! No, I rather think there must be something deeper in it. The girl's mother, perhaps, you understand me. But this is strictly between us two, Mamsell Flor.' All this was puzzling, but the end was very different to anything my stupid head had thought of.

"One evening in October — by some chance or other there had been no riding out that day — Count Henry was busy with the steward's accounts, and Count Ernest had gone out with his gun and his melancholy to the woods. I heard a strange voice in the court, speaking to one of the men, and enquiring for Mamsell Gabrielle. She had just gone to the garden, to cut some dahlias and china-asters for the supper-table. So down I go, to ask the stranger what he wants with her,

and feel quite pleased to hear it is her brother come from England all the way to see her. He had a serious, steady, manly way with him, that I rather liked, though his dress and manner were far below his sister's; indeed his dress was almost shabby. I gave him a hearty welcome, and told him how glad the dear girl would be to see him, and led him through the little postern-gate that opens to the moat and to the garden; and there, standing among the tall flowers, we saw our Gabrielle. She knew him in an instant, but, I thought, for a brother and sister who had not met for years, they were not so very eager about it.

"She turned pale, as though she were going to faint, and he held out his hand, saying a few words in a tone as if he pitied her. 'It is the first time they are together since they have been orphans,' thinks I; 'I must go and leave them by themselves;' and so I went back to my own room, and when I looked out of the window, I still saw them standing as I had left them. He was saying something, but nothing pleasant, it appeared, earnestly, in a low voice, while she only hung her head and listened.

"In about ten minutes' time, Count Ernest came out of the wood, and saw the two as they stood together. He went straight up to the stranger, and bowed to him politely, and I saw that he joined in their conversation. I could not hear what they said, they spoke so quietly. But at last the young count raised his voice: 'You will think better of it perhaps. How is it possible to decide so hastily? What does your sister say? what do you think of it, yourself, Gabrielle? Your sister is quite startled, you see, by this sudden break in the tenour of her life. Not even

your brotherly affection for her should induce you to adopt any violent measures. Your sister is so highly valued by us; — she is so necessary to us all! I am sure she has no reason to wish for any change. If you will remain with us a few days as our guest, you will convince yourself, I hope, that life may be very tolerable in this wilderness of ours.'

"He held out his hand to the stranger, who was, I thought, rather slow to take it, and turned away, and after saying a word or two I could not catch, walked towards the castle.

"Count Ernest remained standing beside Gabrielle, saying nothing at first, but only looking earnestly in her face, while she looked down. Then he began to speak fast and low, and in my heart I felt every word he said, though I heard nothing; upon which she suddenly dropped her flowers, and covering her face with her two hands, she ran away and left him, and I could see that she was crying bitterly.

"He stood looking after her till she disappeared among the woods; he did not venture to follow her, but I saw that his face had that happy thoughtful look he used to have long ago, when, after the long winter, he would stand watching the sun rise above the woods for the first time, and feel that the sweet spring season was at hand.

"My heart melted, and I folded my hands, and prayed; I hardly know what I was praying for, till I heard the stranger's voice in the passage, asking Mr. Pierre if he could be admitted to speak to Count Henry, and there he stayed a long time. I heard them walking up and down in the room above me, talking loud and angrily. When the stranger was gone, and

Count Henry had gone out, Mr. Pierre came and told me what he had heard in the ante-chamber.

"And then, Sir, I heard that the stranger had come all this way from England only to take his sister from us. And do you know what made him come? That duel with the English Lord was at the bottom of it all. It had appeared in the papers, and had been the talk in London for a day or two, and many of my master's old adventures and love affairs had been raked up again; so this brother had had no peace for thinking of it, and at last he had started off, travelling day and night, meaning to fetch his sister away at once, and take her with him just as she stood, without stopping one moment longer.

"*Mon cher,*' had my master said; 'let me tell you that you are acting like a fool, to your own damage. I need not trouble myself to discuss with you what is likely to prove more injurious to your sister, my chastising a man who had insulted her, or your coming here to fetch her away, at a moment's notice, from a home where she is perfectly secure in the respect of all who know her, to take her to a strange place where there are numbers of such lords, who are not often likely to be so kind as to let you shoot them; but, as I said before, that is your own affair. Mine is, to see that your sister's liberty be respected, for she is of age; further, that the legal term of warning be observed. I am not prepared to dismiss my servants at a day's notice, just as they may think fit.'

"The young man had found a thousand reasons to oppose to this, speaking in an abrupt business-like way, and suffering himself to be so far carried away as at last to offer a sum of money for the rupture of

the contract. And then my master had turned his back upon him, and gone out, leaving the bold man standing, who, after some consideration, had hurried away, and left the castle for the next town; probably to consult the burgher-master as to the lengths the law would let him go in his attempts to force the count to give up his sister.

"With all these things buzzing in my head, I felt crosser than ever with Mr. Pierre, and had no ears for his stale jokes. I wanted to ask Gabrielle herself what she wished to do; for, after all, that was the chief thing to be considered. So I went over to her room, to wait till she came back. It was all just as it used to be — the gilding on the mirrors and picture-frames, and on the furniture; and the beautiful hangings of green damask with a large raised pattern on it. And there was her plain servant's-bed under the silk curtains, and her trunk with her bits of clothes. I began to think how it would be if we had a young mistress living there; and while I was pondering, and looking at the picture of Count Henry over the sofa, painted when he was going to be married, (I will shew it you to-morrow, Sir), and seeing some dust upon the consoles, I took the corner of my apron and was going to wipe them, when I heard a noise like mice behind the hangings, and stood still to hear where it was coming from. Well, there is a great mirror in a broad old-fashioned frame, reaching down to the ground, (the fellow of it is up-stairs in Count Henry's room); behind this I heard a rustling and a creaking, and I was looking about to find the hole, when all of a sudden the floor begins to slide, as it were; I see my face in the glass going round, as

if I were giddy, the wall opens in the gaping frame, and who should step out of it but my own Count Ernest!

"If I was dreadfully startled, he was no less astonished. 'Why Flor!' he cried, 'Good evening to you! Are you surprised? Here I come upon you like a thief in the night, in an odd way enough. I had no conception of such a thing — I wanted to speak to my father, and not finding him in his room, I waited for him. I was determined to tell him all, and not to pass another night in a state of such uncertainty. To her I had spoken — her brother wants to take her away, and I asked her whether she would find it so easy to go away and leave us, and if she thought she could be induced to stay for my sake? Upon which she burst into tears and ran away. But I rather hope you were right, Flor, and that there really may be nothing to part us but the coat-of-arms above the gateway. As for that, we might do without it, and quietly settle in a happier home. Just as I was thinking over what I would say to my father, my eye fell by chance on a part of the mirror where the frame appeared to have been damaged. I put my finger upon it mechanically, and was poking at it, when all at once the glass gave way, and then I saw a great gap staring me in the face. I had scarcely stepped through to see what was beyond it, when it closed upon me again and left me in the dark; and finding neither spring nor handle to open it again, there was nothing for it but to grope my way straight on, along a small passage, and then down a small winding staircase all pitch dark, and then I came to a dead halt against a wall. I must own that I had

some slight shudderings and misgivings while I was feeling about for the spring, till I got hold of it. Deuce take these dungeons, Flor!' he cried, quite amused: 'Are there many of these moleworks in this place? — whither have they led me? Where am I now, Flor? Surely . . . this is not your room, Flor? is it — was it not — my mother's? and now, now — does not — yes — does not Gabrielle — sleep —'

"He broke off short, and looked at me — and, oh! such a look of horror flared up in his frightened eyes. And then he closed them, as though he could not bear to look again on any human being. I myself felt more dead than alive, but I made an effort to speak — to say something.

"'It was for her health,' I said; 'only because the sun is on this room, that my master desired me to give it to Gabrielle. My dear boy, — my darling — what is it you are thinking of? What is there in this to trouble you so terribly? That passage, — you see, nobody ever knew of it — not even your father, probably. It is true the mechanism has not rusted — the springs slip smoothly into their grooves, but that is no reason — my dear Count Ernest — you cannot think — how should damp or dust get at it, where we take such care? It is a curious coincidence — a chance;' I said, and tried to feel convinced; 'how could it be anything else? and she such a modest girl, and so particular about her honor; and but a few months ago, my master' — And then I was fool enough — only think of the stupidity, Sir — to go and rake up that story of the duel, and in my fright I thought I was doing wonders to make him easy, and

myself. But even whilst I was talking, the scales were dropping from my eyes; I saw how it was — who ever *does* fight a duel for a servant after all? When I thought of this, I came to stammering, and could find nothing wiser to go on with than: 'It would be beyond belief — it must be a mistake, — or else I could never trust one human creature on earth again — scarcely the Lord in heaven.'

"He looked up at his father's picture on the wall, and then at her little trunk, and I saw that he did not believe in a mistake. I had taken hold of his hand in my agitation, and I felt that it was quite numb and cold; I don't believe there was a pulse in it. 'Flor,' he said, in a low voice; 'You will never tell how it chanced — you will tell no living soul — promise me, Flor.'

"I pressed his hand between both mine. I could not speak, for I felt as if ten millstones had fallen on my heart. He gently drew away his hand and left the room. Where he went, I never could find out. Nobody knew where the others were that evening. Count Henry did not come down to supper, Mamsell Gabrielle's brother did not return, and she herself was walking in the woods long after dark.

"As soon as my trembling legs would carry me, I went over to my own room; I wanted to hear or to see nothing of nobody — least of all, of Mamsell Gabrielle. That evening I hated her with all my heart and soul.

"'If the earth would only open and swallow her up!' I thought to myself a hundred times. 'If the woods would only fall upon her and crush her, before she should come between father and son, to estrange

them still more than they already are!' I upbraided myself bitterly for having been melted by her pale face and her mourning, and taken her into the house, although I had felt a secret warning at the time; and then I thought of my own Count Ernest, how he was wandering all night about the woods half mad with grief — looking on his boyhood's brightest dream — on the only thing he had ever set his heart on — as some unnatural sin — perhaps — who knows? — as an offence to all he held most sacred. 'What will be the end of it all?' I lamented to myself, as I wrung my hands, and I felt as if the coming morning were to dawn on the day of judgment!

"When I heard the girl go past my door at bedtime, I shook all over with my hate and horror of her. If she had happened to come in, I really do not know what I should have done to her. If my boy had been poisoned by her, I don't think I could have hated her more. I could not conceive how I had been so blind.

"Not to call myself a fool, I called her all the names I knew. I abused her for the most horrid hypocrite, the sliest creature that ever ensnared a man or deceived a woman. I tied a great silk handkerchief over my head, that I might not hear her in her room, or be an unwilling witness if anybody came to her in the night.

"If anybody *did*, I did not know it. I had lighted my lamp and taken out my hymn-book; but, God forgive me, I did not know what I was reading. And I was hungry too, for I had not gone down to supper, and that made me feel still crosser with the girl.

"As for my master, I never thought of blaming

anything he did. I had broken myself of *that*, years ago. At last I fell asleep with grief and hunger — at least, I suppose I did, for I was waked up suddenly by feeling a hand laid upon my shoulder. I could not hear, because I had my head tied up.

"The lamp had quite burned down, and the first grey of the morning light might be seen from the window. And beside my chair I saw Mamsell Gabrielle standing. I stared at her, for she had her little straw-bonnet on, and her brown shawl pinned across her chest, and her parasol in her hand. I really had some trouble to collect my thoughts and remember what had happened. Meanwhile that sad gentle face of hers had had time to melt the cruel crust of hate that had gathered about my heart. I untied my handkerchief and got up. 'Good heavens! what have you come here for? is it so late? have I been asleep?'

"My dear Mamsell Flor,' she said, 'it is hardly four o'clock; I am very sorry to disturb you, but I have something to say to you, and I must say it. You were always so kind to me, it would hurt me to have you think ill of me when I am gone, if you did not know my reasons for the step I am about to take.'

"What step?' I cried; 'What are you going to do? You are ready dressed for a journey; you don't mean to go and leave the house in this way, in the dark and cold? Your brother has not come back to fetch you.'

"I am going to him,' she said; 'I am going to beg him to take me away with him — to the very end of the world, rather than leave me here. Oh! that I had only had the courage to do so sooner! Miserable

I might have been, for I should have left my heart behind me, but I should not have been sinful; and I could have looked you bravely in the face and said good-bye to you, my dear kind friend, who have been a mother to me. I know you will forgive me for all I have done, you are so good and pitiful. But now you will shiver when you hear my name, and when you think of one who has been the cause of all this misery, and made your darling feel the greatest pain a man can feel. Dear Mamsell Flor, only yesterday he told me that he loved me, — and I . . . for many months I have been his father's —'

"She stopped, as if in horror at the sound of her own words; and I who but yesterday had been so full of rage and hate, Sir, a daughter of my own could hardly have melted me so soon. She stood before me the very picture of wretchedness, her bosom heaving, her eyes drooping, as though she could not bear one ray of light to fall upon her and her miserable lost life. I sat like one struck dumb, and at last, only to say something:

"'Won't you take a seat?' I said, 'You have a long way to go;' and then immediately I blushed at my own silliness — such foolish words, you know, Sir, — so out of place. But she did not seem to hear me. After a pause, she said:

"'I did what I could to save myself in time; you know that. I plainly saw my danger — plainly — I am not naturally careless. I am not a giddy girl, dear Flor. I walked into this with open eyes — that is, I thought I knew the path I had chosen; I little dreamed that it could lead to this. Did I say with

open eyes? Yet I think they might be blinded by my tears. I cried so terribly when I saw his wound, and knew it was for me. He had often tried to make me love him, and I had told him more than once that I never would be his, except as his wedded wife — *that* I could never be, he told me; he had a son who was not to be defrauded of his inheritance, and who would be shocked if he gave him a young stepmother. 'As it is, we never can agree,' he said; 'and this would bring us to an open rupture.' He took some trouble to make this very plain to me, but he never succeeded in altering my resolution. I had never heard of what he called a conscience-marriage, and all my principles rose up against it — not to speak of my pride, that revolted at the secresy. If two persons are worthy of each other, I thought, and their consciences worthy of being called to witness what they do, why should there be secret?

" 'I was in sore trouble day and night, and God knows how I struggled, Flor! To hear that proud man — naturally so violent and so imperious — to hear *him* beg and beseech, and to see him suffer, and to go on living here in this solitary wilderness beside him, without a soul to help me, or any counsel, save my own weak heart — it was hard to bear, it was terrible! and it was worse when he never spoke to me at all for months, nor even looked at me; and all the while I could see how his dumb passion was wearing him out; and then at last the blood from that wound! — then I did feel my courage spent, and I gave myself up. Dear Flor, if there really be a woman's pride, that could have taken her through all this unmoved — ordeals, I may say, by fire and water

— if there be such courage, I hardly think I could covet it!

“‘We took an oath,’ she went on; ‘we pledged ourselves to eternal constancy and to secresy. My mind was at peace — happy I was not. Not that I ever doubted him, whatever he may have done — and indeed he never tried to make me think better of him than others. This I know — never will he love another woman now, nor I another man. But there was always a heavy presentiment of evil that was to come — and now it has come, and my life is at an end.

“‘It is not possible for me to remain where I am,’ she continued; ‘between father and son. If Count Ernest had come back, and found me as his father’s lawful wife, he would have smothered his boyish flame at once, and all would have been plain and open. But now this wretched secresy has borne its bitter fruits! I have prayed to God to guide me, and I am resolved to take it all upon myself, and by leaving the house at once, to save what there is yet to save. If I were to die, it would be the best thing I could do for all of us, and so I must anticipate death, and take myself away, never to be heard of more. I will tell my brother all, and that shall be my penance. I do not mean to spare myself, for henceforth I shall have to live all my days alone. But it will be a comfort to me, dear Flor, to think that you remember me and have a kindly feeling for me!’

“I held her hand and stroked her cheek; ‘I will never forget you, dear,’ I said: ‘Wherever you go, my heart will follow you;’ and it quite moved me to see a faint rose return to her pale cheeks, with plea-

sure at hearing me speak so. She drew a deep breath, as if a load had been taken off her mind; and then she begged me to keep her flight a secret. Afterwards, when it was no longer to be concealed, I was to say that she had gone to her brother to persuade him to go back to England quietly, and that perhaps she would not come back that night.

“‘When I am safe across the channel, I will write to the count,’ she said; ‘and as for you, my best and dearest friend, I shall always think of your love and goodness for me to my dying day.’

“And she fell upon my neck, and cried so bitterly that I cried myself while I was trying to comfort her — saying the most stupid things — for my poor old head was all astray. I could hardly get out the words for sobbing, and only kept repeating: ‘God bless you, poor dear! — bless you! — don’t forget your own old Flor, who wronged you so! — you are far too good to be so wretched!’

“As if, in this world, the good people were the best off! As if my blessed mistress had not been an angel even before she died!

“As soon as we heard the first birds singing in the woods, the pretty creature rose and dried her eyes, and gave me her hand to say good-bye; and when at the door she turned round to nod to me again, she looked so lovely that I looked after her, as if I had been her lover myself, and ran to the window to see her pass through the little gate, and walk towards the wood to wave my hand to her again. The day was dawning gradually over the trees, that all stood still, as if asleep, till the dew fell, and then they began to stir in the morning air. To this moment I

can remember how I felt, as I put out my hot head to cool the fever in it, and let the fresh breeze blow over my hair. 'God be praised! who gave that poor girl the sense and courage to go at once, and make an end of it!' I thought one moment, and the next — 'But has she a right to go? If that be true about the oath she took, and the conscience-marriage, can she — can any woman — go and leave her husband as though her life were still her own to dispose of?' Yet at every step she was taking farther out into the wide world and farther from the castle, I felt the weight on my heart loosening, and I imagined that if only my poor dear boy were safe never to set eyes on her again, all might yet be well, and we might leave the rest to Providence.

"She must have got a good start by the time our people began to be stirring about the stables and the farm-buildings, and my master never got up till several hours later. I always was the earliest in the house, and had more than enough to do and to look after, but that morning I could think of nothing at all; my head was dazed, everything seemed running in it at once — I took a whole hour to plait up my poor wisps of hair before I could make up my mind to leave the room. For I thought I should meet the count, and if he were to ask for Mamsell Gabrielle, I was sure to stammer and hesitate, and very likely to confess the whole. However, I could not hold out any longer, I wanted so much to go and see what my poor Count Ernest was about. I went along on tip-toe, and slowly up the stairs. My legs shook as though I had grown to eighty in a single night.

"I listened at the door of his room, and hearing

nothing, I softly opened it and went in. The room was empty, and the bed untouched; but he must have spent the night here, for the candles were burned down to their sockets. It all looked so sad, it made me begin to cry again, as I went about setting things to rights, and opening the windows. I looked out far over the tree-tops, and fell a-thinking. I can remember that I almost went into a passion with that faded dog-boy there on the tapestry, who grins and looks so happy, shewing all his teeth. 'Whatever happens, that fool must grin,' I said; sorrow had made me that distracted, that even a picture on the wall could provoke me, Sir.

"All at once I heard the piano in the room below me, long before the time when my master was used to rise. 'The whole world is topsy-turvy;' I thought, as I went downstairs. Now that I was sure not to meet the count, I wanted to go and look for my dear boy all over the castle and about the grounds.

"When I came to the door of my lady's room, where we had put Mamsell Gabrielle, I could not pass it. I felt drawn in against my will, as it were — it was like those places where dreadful murders have been committed. I stood staring at the glass, and talking to myself like a mad woman. We women are a weak and a curious race, you know, Sir, and have a right to be, as our mother Eve was before us; and I could not help fumbling about till I had found the mechanism; and then, I thought, I would take one peep at the hidden passage — just one peep, I thought — but when the mirror turned upon its hinges, I had one foot over without intending it, and then the other — and I found myself walking on, hardly venturing

to breathe, and the door had closed behind me of itself. I was not frightened. If I really never did get out, or saw the light of day again, what would it matter? What is there in the world to please me, where all is temptation and disappointment, and where one man plays the part of Lucifer to the other?

"I saw a faint streak of light falling through a crack, and so I went on till I came to the steps; I went up cautiously; I heard the piano getting louder and louder as I went up. While I live, I shall not forget that strange feeling; the dark dank air, like a prison, and the beautiful music pealing above my head.

"I felt as if I were in my grave, and thousands of birds were singing over the sod, and I could hear them and understand them all. At the last step I stood still — 'Where does this lead to?' I thought, 'and shall I be able to get out?' and I turned cold all over, when I saw that this passage could only lead into Count Henry's morning-room, just where the piano stood. If I were to walk in suddenly, what would he think of me?

"Then I saw the light shining through a hole in the wall, and that made me go on again. The mirror had been injured at one place, which looked like a spot or blemish, and it had often vexed me while I was cleaning it; and now I saw that it had been done on purpose, to enable one to look into the room and see that all was safe, before putting the springs in motion and opening the door.

"I crept close up and peeped in. Count Henry was sitting at the piano, in his short velvet morning-dress, with his back turned to the mirror, and all the

windows were standing wide open. I was going to steal away again, but the music bewitched me, as it were; I never could get enough of it. It was easy enough for it to steal away the heart of a poor young lonely creature like Gabrielle, when it could so bewilder an old thing like me! It all came of itself while he was playing, out of his own head. It was as if he were talking with the spirits within him, and soothing them when he felt his fits of passion coming on; and at those times the music sounded like two distinct and separate voices discoursing — angry first, and quarrelling, and then at peace.

“What storm was raging in him that morning I do not know. He could not be thinking of Gabrielle’s brother, — he was not uneasy about that, — for he was fully persuaded that she herself would never leave him — neither of Count Ernest; for what did he know of what he was feeling? But he must have a kind of presentiment that some great event was impending, for the music was like the sound of a coming storm, and one could hear the first roll of the distant thunder. It made me feel so frightened and uncomfortable — partly because of the confined air in that little passage — that I stood up, and was just going away, when the door of the ante-chamber opened, and my dear Count Ernest came in.

“His father looked round, but he made a sign to beg him not to let himself be disturbed, but to go on playing, and he sat down in an arm-chair to wait; he sat so that I could see his face straight before me. There was something so grave and grand about it, and yet so subdued and peaceful, — he looked handsomer than I ever saw him. He did not raise his eyes

to the secret door; it was pain and grief to him to know that it was there. He was very pale, and he looked down as if he were studying the pattern of the inlaid floor, with a look of forced cheerfulness that made my heart ache. And though he never moved an eyelid, I saw his eyes getting wet, and then two large tears glittering beneath his eyelashes, while his mouth remained as quiet and sweet as ever. I saw that the music was too much for him, and almost overcame him. His father did not seem to notice it; he went on playing for some time longer, until at last, closing with a magnificent unison of all the voices, he shut down the piano, got up, and took a few hasty turns about the room. He never looked at his son, (in general he seldom did); but still he appeared to be in a good humour, and took up a new fowling-piece that was lying on the table to shew it him.

“‘You are just come when I wanted you,’ he said. ‘I was going to send over Pierre to ask whether you would like to take a ride with me through the forest. Pierre tried this gun yesterday, and says he thinks it is even better than my English one; did he speak to you about it?’

“‘No, he did not;’ and the young count rose also; ‘and I rather fear I shall not be able to accompany you, my dear father. I have come to a sudden decision about Stockholm, and I mean to go at once. You say very justly, that it would be far too soon for me to stay here and bury myself among these woods, without at least one trial of what I may be fit for in this world. And I am come to say good-bye — that is, if you still approve of my decision as much as I

hoped you would, concluding from the wishes you have so frequently expressed.'

"He spoke calmly and cheerfully; but oh! it was woe to me to hear him! I could hear every word through the slight partition, and I held my breath, for I even fancied they must hear how my heart was beating. I did not dare to move, and so I stayed, and heard all they said. I found I was to lose him again; and when to see him, who could tell? — never perhaps. I knew what made him go. He was resolved never to see the girl again. But she was gone, and what would they do when they found *that* out? When I tried to think of this, my five senses failed me, and so I rather listened to what they were saying. I cannot repeat every word, but it was beautiful to hear my young count explaining to his father how the post at Stockholm had just then acquired a great importance, in consequence of our commercial relations, and what not; and how clearly he saw it all, and knew what he had to do.

"Meanwhile the elder count was walking up and down, and never spoke a word till he had done. Then he stopped short before his son, and held out his hand to him; 'You are perfectly right in all you say, and I entirely approve of the step you are about to take,' he said. 'I know it is a sacrifice to my wishes on your part, for in fact, you are not a man of action, you have far more of the German scholar in you, but in your new position you will soon have shaken off the last vestige of school-dust; and by-and-by you will agree with me, that my wishes were entirely for your own good. When do you start?'

"'This very day, if you approve, Sir; I would

take Fatme as far as the station, and Pierre could take the horses back in the evening. My things can be sent after me.'

"His father nodded, and again they remained silent for a time. My Ernest had still something weighing heavy on his mind — that I saw by his face.

"At last he said: 'And you, my dear father, what have you decided upon doing? What are your plans for the present? Do you mean to spend the winter here?'

"I rather think so. I fancy I have had enough of being tossed about. A quiet time in port to rest, would do no harm for a change.'

"This is a solitary place,' returned his son, 'and our neighbours are not much resource. Will you laugh at me if I ask you a strange question? Did it never occur to you to think of marrying again?'

"The count gave a loud laugh. 'Well, I must say, you do ask searching questions,' he said. 'You would like to do a good action before you go, and see that your father is well provided for. Give it up, my son, give it up! A second marriage is but a second folly; and if age cannot save us from folly, youth at least, should not tempt us to it.'

"You are not speaking seriously, Sir,' returned Count Ernest; 'I have found you younger this time than when I left you five years ago. If you really should decide on settling here, only consider how a young mistress would improve the place — one who would prevent your growing old before your time; and when that time does come in good earnest, would make those quiet years pleasant to you. I know that

I leave you in the best of hands,' he went on; 'our Flor is fidelity itself, but you require more than she can do for you, and as I cannot tell when I may come back, I —'

"He stopped short, and I saw that he had some trouble to hide his emotion. His father turned a searching look on him, and after a pause he drily answered: 'Enough of this; I am very well as I am; and though I may find other ways than you would, of combating dulness, I shall not run to seed as you suppose. There are foxes enough to be shot, while my hand can hold a gun; and when the end of all ends comes, I shall sit down and write my memoirs, as a pattern to this generation of propriety — that is, a pattern to be avoided.'

"He now evidently expected his son to take his leave, but Count Ernest stood still, with his eyes fixed on his father's face. Count Henry did not seem to feel quite easy under them; he looked annoyed, and added, as if in jest: 'Well, and don't these prospects please you? I do believe you have a match all ready made for me, and intend to show me that your talents in the diplomatic line are greater than I should have supposed. May I ask who the lady is? I confess I am getting curious. Is it young F., with her Madonna eyes, and her liberal portion of freckles? or Comtesse C., with her shortened leg, and her never-ending giggle, who would persuade herself and the world, (though the world knows better), that she has not seen sixteen summers?' And so he went on, through the list of all the young ladies in the neighbourhood, caricaturing them with a few sharp strokes, but without succeeding in moving a muscle of his son's countenance.

"When he came to the end: 'You are on the

wrong track, dear father,' he said; 'It is no fine lady I am thinking of, nor should I like to see any of these in this house, as its mistress. But there is a prize much nearer home, that I should be glad to see you win. Have you really never noticed the young lady who helps our Flor to rule the house? She is fond of you, I know. Her passionate attachment to you has grown too strong for her to conceal it even from herself.'

"The count stood rooted to the ground, and I saw a dark frown gather on his brow. But he always knew how to command himself. With a laugh that did not come from his heart: 'Mort de ma vie!' he cried — 'Mamsell Gabrielle? Why, that would indeed be a triumph of the new school over the old, if you have managed to discover more in these three weeks, than I in the last two years!'

"'To be candid with you, Sir,' said Count Ernest, 'I must honestly confess that I did not discover this until last night — not, at least, with any certainty. I was witness to the poor girl's struggle when her brother wanted her to go with him, and I saw that it would be the death of her to part from you.'

"'Part from me! — stuff and nonsense!' cried his father. 'That brother of hers startled her — he is a hard-headed fool. It was his coming here so fast and furious, as if it were a matter of life and death, that frightened the girl out of her senses. I tell you, you are mistaken. And besides, who says she is to go? She is of age, and can do as she likes; I mean to take care that she does — her free will shall be protected.'

"Another pause, and then the son: 'Are you sure

she may not have to suffer for being so protected? Let me own to you that I went over to X. last night, to speak to this brother of hers. He told me how chivalrous you had been, in defending his sister on one occasion, and also what had been said about it at the time. If you do not intend to sacrifice your protégé's good name for ever, it is indeed high time to dismiss her, or to give her a name that will effectually protect her. Dearest father,' he continued while my master sat silent, angrily gnawing his lip; 'Do not be angry with me for venturing to interfere with any of your decisions. I have set my heart on seeing you in possession of this good fortune, which has been so long within your reach, though you would not see it. Of course, I do not know how you may feel towards this young lady; whether you would care to see her go out alone into an uncertain world — alone with her secret, her grief, and her love for you. But if you really have one spark of feeling for her, why not take a creature so fair and good, and make her your own for ever? If you do decide in haste, I am certain that you will not repent at leisure.'

"All this time I had never taken my eyes off my darling's face, and I saw it glowing and reddening, till his eyes were all glittering with tears.

"He was standing before his father, and had taken one of his hands in his. 'Strange boy!' his father said; 'I do believe you mean it — you would like to make me leap into this adventure blindfold, as my own folly has often made me do in others. What is there about this girl to make you plead her cause so passionately? And, when I come to think of it, your proposal is not so utterly to be despised. I have

only to think of our highborn neighbours, and of their indignation when they hear that Count * * * has married his housekeeper, to feel ready for the wedding at once. It would be a satisfaction, but I am afraid it is a satisfaction of which I must deprive myself. Not that there is anything in your taste to be objected to — she comes of a respectable family, and has manners that many a countess might envy her. Yet, it won't do, Ernest, give it up — yes, I will talk to her brother; we will do all that is right to be done, only do you go away now, and leave me to myself for half an hour. Why,' he went on, as his son still kept hold of his hand; 'are you not satisfied that I should have done this proposal of yours the honor of thinking it worth a moment's consideration? Enough of this! I say again. I acknowledge the kindness of your heart, that would be glad to see me happy; but hearts are giddy things, and are apt to come to their senses after it is too late.'

"And he talked on in this style, without ever once looking at his son. Then he got up, went to the piano, struck a chord or two, went to the window, and shut it hastily.

"'There is something in this you will not tell me,' said his son. 'You are disturbed. You have a reason you will not give me for not doing as I request. I know your way of looking on these disparities of position; therefore it is not that — and what else can it be? For I see by your agitation that the young lady is not indifferent to you.'

"He waited for an answer, in vain. 'I know,' at length he said, very sadly, in a tone of deep dejection; 'I have never been so fortunate as to find my

way to your confidence, though, God knows, I have sought it with all my heart; and I never regretted this so much as I do now; but I have been forgetting myself — this conversation has lasted too long already. You think it absurd that a son should take his father's happiness to heart. I have only now to beg your pardon, and to say good-bye.'

"The count turned from the window to look at his son from head to foot, as if he would read through him.

"Go out into the world, my son, and let the bitter blasts from the so-called summits of society blow over your brains a while, and cool down the effervescence of that strange fanciful heart of yours, and blow away the last of your romantic prejudices. You will soon come and thank me for not having consented to give you a young stepmother, and perhaps a batch of younger brothers. Your fortune would never be sufficient to enable you to move with ease in the society to which you belong, if you had to divide it with a young stepmother, and possibly with other children, far less if you gave it up to them, and had to live on your mother's portion only. On the other hand, a woman I had made a countess of, I should not choose to leave a beggar. Now, have I spoken plainly? and do we understand each other?"

"We do;" slowly repeated Count Ernest, with a faltering voice; and after a moment of meditation, he went up to the table, where among other things there was an inkstand, and taking out a sheet of paper from his father's portfolio, he wrote a line or two, standing where he was. He had hardly finished, when the elder count came up. 'What on earth are you about?

what is this new fancy of yours?' he cried; 'I do believe you are getting up a comedy. I hope you do not mean —'

"My dear father,' said Count Ernest, placing the written paper before him: 'let me entreat you to do nothing hasty; see here, what I have written; and if you really would make me happy before I go, and do me the greatest favor, please put your seal and signature here, as a ratification of mine. I have sometimes thought I must seem stranger to you than any stranger; our ways of thinking are so different. At the age when sons grow up to be their father's friends, I have been pained to find how little I have been yours. You have given me this moment a strong proof of your affection. But if you repent of it, if you would annul it, and prove to me that I am still as far from understanding you, or doing anything to make you happy, as my poor mother always was, — then, I say, — destroy that paper.'

"Count Henry took it, and I saw his hand tremble, as he held it up to read it. 'Ernest,' he said; 'this is simply impossible; there never can be any question of your giving up this property, to have it settled on a stepmother and her heirs; it can't be done.'

"The paper fell upon the table, and the two stood side by side for a minute without speaking, and that sunny room was still as death.

"All at once we heard a quick step coming through the ante-chamber, and Pierre came, out of breath, to say:

"Monsieur le Comte! Is M. le Comte aware that Mamsell Gabrielle is missing, and that the ranger's assistant met her before day-break, walking on the

road to X, and that Mamsell Flor has been missed as well, and looked for all over the house without being found?’

“‘The calèche to the door, this instant!’ cried my master, snatching at his hat, that lay on a chair. ‘Stay,’ he called after the man who was already on the threshold; ‘my horse — have it saddled and brought round — allons!’

“‘I will accompany you, Sir, if I may,’ said Count Ernest; ‘as it is, I am all ready for the road.’ And he would have hurried away after the servant, but his father held him back, looked in his face without saying a word, and then suddenly folding him in his arms, they stood for a moment heart to heart. After that I saw no more; my eyes were running over, and everything was swimming before me. By the time I had got them dry again — and that was not easy — the room was empty, and only the paper on the table was there to tell me that it had not been all a dream.

“How I felt as I got down the winding staircase, you may fancy, Sir; — when I had found the door again, groping about with my trembling hands, and stepped out of the dark into the broad daylight again, I felt as if it were a quite new world I was coming to. I heard the horses’ hoofs on the pavement of the court, and I saw from the window father and son galloping over the bridge together, while the light carriage that was going to fetch our Gabrielle, was driving gaily after them in the morning sunshine.

“Yes, Sir, and it was a pretty sight to see: that poor thing that had stolen out of the house by the back-gate, before daybreak, and all alone, coming back joyfully by the light of noonday, driving over the

great drawbridge, and her master on his grand horse, riding proudly by her side, and him leaping from his saddle, to open the carriage-door, and give her his arm to lead her up the steps!

"And there was a still finer sight to be seen eight days after, when there was a fine wedding at the castle. They were married in the great saloon, and the dinner was downstairs in the hall; and there sat Count Henry at the master's table, with his beautiful young wife, and her brother; and all of us dined at the other table, with flowers and wreaths all over, and the band from X. playing in the gallery. They danced till long past twelve o'clock, and the young countess danced with every one, from the steward to the assistant ranger, and it was talked of all over the country, ever so long after. But to me, sir, the best of all was wanting, and I cannot say that I felt really happy for a single moment. For my dear Count Ernest had not returned with them that morning, and I had not even been able to take leave of him! — And all the time the band was playing, I could not keep from thinking of him, at sea, on his way to Sweden, in that cold night, hearing nothing but the salt waves beating against the ship, and the rough winds blowing.

"When the wedding gaieties were over, everything in the castle went on as it had done before, only that we spoke of our gracious countess, instead of Mamsell Gabrielle, and that the new-married pair rode out every day, and that often when my master played, his young wife sang.

"We had no visits, for those my master and mistress paid among the families of the neighbourhood, were not returned; at which our master only laughed, and

indeed, it seemed as if nothing ever could succeed in spoiling his temper again. If anything occurred among the servants, or in the stables, which we would have been afraid to tell him formerly, we had only to speak to the countess, who always knew how to make things smooth, and to charm away his angry mood.

"Only once, I heard her beg and beseech in vain. It was soon after New Year's Day, the snow was very deep, and we lay buried among the woods, as if we had been walled up. An invitation came from the grand duke to a ball at court. It was a ball where all the grand folks of the whole country came together. Last winter our master had gone there too, though he was not in very high favor in that quarter. A court-lackey on horseback had brought the invitation, my master and mistress were at table, and I still see the count, as he pushed away his plate and rose, and walked about the room.

"'What an insult,' — he cried, — while his wife seemed anxious to quiet him. 'They have not included my wife in this invitation; — and yet we shall both do them the honor of going.' And in spite of all that the countess could say or pray, he made the man come in, and ordered him to take back his answer, that the count had accepted the invitation, both for himself and his countess.

"After that he seemed in particularly good spirits, and never minded the countess's petitions, but kissed her forehead, and said: 'Don't you be frightened, child. It is the first time, I ever returned an insult with a favor; I choose to show them that you are their superior, and you must not spoil my sport.'

"And so it really came to my dressing my Gabrielle,

— I mean my gracious mistress, — for a ball. She wore a beautiful white satin dress, with a wreath of scarlet and gold in her hair, and she looked like a queen.

“‘Comme une reine;’ said Monsieur Pierre, who rode before the sledge with a lantern; and sweet she did look, as she nodded to me out of her veils and furs, to say good-bye, and my master, who drove himself, was just cracking his whip to start.

“I was quite in love with her myself, and sat up all that long night awake by the fire, ready to receive her when she came home. I will not weary you, sir, by repeating all I was thinking of the while. It made me go to sleep myself, and I only waked towards morning at the noise of the sledge bells. When I came running down, the count was already leading his countess up to her room. Neither of them seemed tired at all; they looked as bright and happy as if something particular had occurred to please them. When he said good night, he took her tenderly in his arms, — before me, sir, and all the servants, — held her there for a minute, as if he had forgotten the whole world besides. I saw how much moved she was, and I followed her into her room to help her to undress. As soon as we were alone, she fell upon my neck in tears, and as she always had treated me as a mother, she told me all that had taken place. They had created a great sensation, when they came in, later than the rest. The duchess, who was a very haughty woman, had not said a word, when the count led her up and presented her as his wife. But the young duke had been excessively courteous, and had opened the ball with her, and had distinguished her more than all the

other ladies. She had felt completely at her ease, and I could easily see that she had been the reigning beauty.

"But to her great alarm, she had come upon that rude English lord, standing at one of the card-tables, and only on seeing her husband so indifferent and calm, had she been able to recover her self-possession. After one of the dances, the count had led her into another room to take some refreshment; and there he had introduced some gentlemen to her. Meanwhile the Englishman had come in with some ladies, unobserved; and he had raised his eye-glass with a fixed stare at her, and had said quite out loud: 'For a chamber-maid, she is not without tournure.' There had been a dead silence; the count had changed color, and soon after he had said, in a tone of the greatest indifference: 'Look there, Gabrielle, don't you see a striking likeness between that gentleman who has just come in, and that illbred person who was once so rude to you, and was served with a taste of my horsewhip and my pistols as the consequence? I rather think the horse-whip would have been enough; people who know him are apt to think him hardly worth the powder and shot.'

"You can fancy, sir, how my poor countess felt when he said this. However, she heard no more just then, for the duke came in to the refreshment-room after his partner, and was politeness itself, and all attention. I fancy more than one of these highborn ladies, must have gone green and yellow with envy and jealousy. When the fête was over, and my master and mistress took their leave, the English lord had followed them in a very insulting manner and

when they came to the staircase had whispered a word or two in the count's ear; who had then stood still, and had answered quite loud enough to be heard by all the footmen, and some of the court-gentlemen who were standing about:

"This time you will have to look for another player at that game, my lord — I have found a prize since then, which I have no intention of staking on one card: even if I were certain that the cards were not false, as, they did say in the London clubs, some people are in the habit of using. In case you should require any further satisfaction, my horsewhip is still, as it was then, very much at your service.'

"And with that he had gone, and left the fellow standing. On their way home, he had said to Gabrielle: 'I trust this is the last remnant of my past life that will ever rise up to throw a shadow on my present happiness. You alone are all my present and all my future, in this world.' And he had said more of the like loving, heart-felt things that kept her warmer in the cold and snow of that winter night than all her furs.

"From that time they lived alone, and were all and all to each other, refusing every invitation that came from court — only now and then, they took little journeys; though it was easy to see that they were always happiest at home, among our solitary woods. The countess never changed to me, and used always to tell me everything. The only thing we never spoke of, was what had passed between us on that awful morning, when she had wanted to go away — I never heard whether she confessed the real reason to her husband. I rather think it likely that she did, for now

the count had a peculiar look of tenderness, whenever he mentioned his absent son; even when he got a letter from Stockholm. When that happened he would send for me upstairs, and talk to me of my darling, and give me the love he never forgot to send me. Once or twice a year he wrote to me himself; familiarly and kindly, as ever, but never a word of what was most important to me — not a word of what he felt or thought.

“When he had been about two years away, he wrote to announce his intended marriage with a high-born young lady in Sweden, and to ask for his father’s consent. To me he wrote, that he hoped I should not withhold my blessing, as his bride was exactly such as I would have chosen for him myself. And afterwards he sent me her picture; — an angel’s face; all gentleness and goodness. Before I had seen it, I used sometimes to torment myself with thinking that he had only made up his mind to marry, in order to set his father’s mind at rest. But I knew, those great clear, innocent eyes of hers, must have found their way to his heart.

“Then came accounts of the wedding, and of their beautiful wedding-tour among the mountains. You will hardly believe it, sir, but even then the young countess found time and thoughts to spare for poor old Flor. She wrote to thank me, for having taken such care of her Ernest all his life, she said. But there was no word of their coming back to Germany, especially after the pair of twins was born — which event was an occasion of great rejoicing here in this castle. The count used to talk of going to Sweden, and taking me along with them; and you will believe that my head was turned by the thoughts of such a journey, and such a meeting.

"But it is not for us to number our days — many an old cripple, or useless pensioner, has to stand sentinel a weary while, watching for the call, and waiting to be relieved. And other lives, on which a whole world of happiness hangs, are taken — we do not know how or why.

"One day Count Henry was carried home for dead. He had been thrown from his horse, and had received some internal injury, which no doctor was able to discover. He came to himself again, but only with a faint light of consciousness or memory. He knew the countess and me, but no one else — Pierre he would not suffer in the room at all. He took him for a rat, and cried incessantly; 'Take it away! — catch it! — set a trap for it! — it has gnawed away my wedding-garment. See what a hole it has bitten in it!'

"And then he would call upon his son so movingly, it was impossible to hear him without tears. The countess had written immediately to Count Ernest, to tell him the state in which his father was; I only feared he might come too late.

"Do not ask me, Sir, to describe those days, and the nights we had to live through, nor the heart-rending sight it was to see that young wife, who never uttered one word of complaint, but rather was a support to us all. On the twelfth day, the young count came. We had hardly expected him so soon, and we were almost startled when he entered the sick room.

"As soon as he heard the door open, my master waked up from the lethargy in which he had been lying, and sat up, and in a voice which I shall hear all my life, he cried: 'Ernest, my son!' and burst into a passion of tears, and wept as though his

spirit were passing away through his eyes. After that he became surprisingly cheerful and sensible, and lay quietly, holding his son's hand in his. He talked again without rambling; so for one moment we hoped the worst was over, and the turn taken towards getting better. But ten minutes after, his eyes grew dim again; he gave one look at his countess, and said: 'Ernest will take care of you.' He was going to say something to his son as well, when he fell back and was gone.

"You must excuse me, Sir, for telling you all this so particularly, but you must let me say a few words more, to tell you how it ended. Alas! the end came soon enough! The very day after the funeral Count Ernest went away again, after having done all that could be done, by seals and documents, to make the countess complete mistress of the whole. For they had found no will. Count Henry knew well enough that he had only to say; 'Ernest will provide for you,' to close his eyes in peace.

"'If there is anything I can do for you, I beg you to command me in every way;' my dear Count Ernest had said to his stepmother before he went. 'If you should ever find this solitude too much for you, I hope you will remember that my wife is waiting to receive you with open arms.'

"She looked at him affectionately, and held out her hand, which he respectfully took and kissed.

"'You are well cared for;' he said in a low voice; 'I leave you with my own faithful Flor — I only beg you will bring her with you, when you come to Sweden.'

"Of course this was more than I could hear with dry eyes. So I threw my apron over my face, and

ran away — but in the passage he held me fast, and kissed me quite vehemently, and I felt how his heart was beating, and the hot tears from his eyes came dripping on my grey hairs.

“My boy, my Ernest, my dearest master!’ I said; — ‘God bless you for having come! as He has already blessed you for your truth and tenderness. He did not take your father until you had heard from his dying lips, that he well knew what a son he was leaving. Go, and God be with you! Give old Flor’s love to your countess, and to the darling children; tell them that Flor has no other wish on earth, but that the whole world might know Count Ernest’s heart as she knows it, and then the whole world would be ready to lay their hands beneath your feet, as she is.’

“He broke away from me, and ordered his horses to meet him at the top of the walk that leads up the forest — He walked on before, and I heard people say that he had wandered about the forest, taking leave of the spots he loved, and now looked upon for the last time. So even at that time he must have resolved never to return. He could not be happy again in his old home.

“And so I knew that I had taken leave of him for ever. I would have fretted still more about it, only I was so taken up with my mistress. She pined away; white and quiet, and without a murmur. It was just as if strong hands were dragging her down into her husband’s grave. Even dead, that proud man ruled her. When I wrote the sad tidings to Count Ernest — it is hardly a year ago — he answered me immediately; he said I was to go to them, at all events; and the young countess wrote and begged me, as hard as one

can beg. My Ernest had given up his post, and settled where they are living still, on a very fine estate among the hills, close by the sea, where I suppose it must be beautiful.

"'I would come myself to fetch you,' he wrote; 'only I am too conscientious in my duties as a husband and a husbandman, to go from home in harvest-time.'

"He did not like to give his real reason. But all this melted me, and I got my bits of things together, and gave over my keys to the new steward. The countess's brother had a pride of his own, and never would have anything to do with her inheritance; and so, one fine morning, I really was quite ready to go, and drove away. But when I got to that road in the hollow, to the place where one can see these chimney tops just peeping above the woods, my heart failed me all at once, and I jumped out of the carriage, and ran home as if the fiends had hunted me. And when I got back into our court, I felt as if I had been a hundred years away.

"Ah! Sir, it is no good transplanting a rotten tree! — it should be left standing where it grew, waiting for the axe. Heaven knows, I would gladly give the few years I have to live to see my Ernest's children only once; to take them in my arms, and hug those darling babes; but I know I could never be dragged so far. They would have to bury me in the sea, and my ghost would walk the wild salt waves, and never rest in peace.

"How different here, where our own pleasant woods are shading the graves where my master and mistress are lying side by side. The birds singing among the

branches, and the deer grazing peacefully round the two grave-stones that bear their names.

“When old Flor’s weary eyes are closed, and there is no one alive to tend them, they will soon be overgrown with moss and brushwood; and in the woods where these two hid their happiness from the world, their rest is hidden — and there, please God, shall mine be.”

BLIND.

"B L I N D."

CHAPTER I.

At a window which opened over a little flower-garden, stood the blind daughter of the village sexton, and sought revival from the wind as it blew over her hot face. The delicate half-grown figure shook, and the small cold hands lay clasped upon the window-sill.

Farther back in the room, sat a blind boy, on a stool before the old spinet, playing restless melodies. He might be about fifteen; scarcely a year older than the girl. No one who saw and heard him, as he lifted up his large open eyes, or bent his head towards the window, could have guessed him to be so afflicted — there was so much security, nay, vehemence, in his movements.

He broke off suddenly, in the midst of a sacred song that had been running wild beneath his fingers.

"Did you sigh, Marlene?" he asked, without turning his head.

"Not I, Clement; what should I sigh for? I only started when the wind burst in so suddenly."

"But sigh you did! Do you think I do not hear you when I play? When you shiver, I feel it even here."

"Yes, it is cold now."

"You don't deceive me! If you were only cold, you would not be standing there at the window. And I know what makes you sigh and tremble; you are afraid because the doctor is to come to-morrow and pierce our eyes with needles. Yet he told us how quickly it is done, and that it is only like the sting of a gnat. You used to be so brave and patient. When I was little, and used to cry when I was hurt, were not you always held up as a pattern to me by my mother, though you are only a girl. And now you cannot find your courage, and do not in the least think of all the joy that is to come after."

She shook her head. "Can you believe me to be afraid of so short a pain? And yet I am oppressed by foolish childish fancies, from which I cannot see my way. From that day when the strange doctor for whom the baron sent, came down from the great house to see your father, and your mother called us in to him from the garden — from that hour there has been a weight upon me which will not go. You were so glad, you took no notice; but when your father knelt down, and began to return thanks to God for this great mercy, my heart was dumb within me, and I could not join. I tried to find a reason for being thankful, but I could feel none."

She said this very quietly, and her voice was steady. He struck a few gentle chords. Between the hoarse jarring tones peculiar to such old instruments, sounded the distant song of returning labourers — contrasting, as did that life, in its plenitude of light and power, with the dream-life of these two blind children.

The boy appeared to feel it; he rose hastily, and went to the window with unerring step — for he knew that room and everything it contained — and, tossing back his fine fair curls, he said:

"You are fanciful, Marlene; our fathers and mothers and all the village wish us joy, and should it not be joy? — before they promised this, I did not mind. We are blind, they say; I never knew what it was we wanted. When visitors used to come and see my mother, and we heard them pity us, and say; 'Ah, those poor children!' I used to get so angry. What right have they to pity us? I thought. Still, I always knew that we are not like other people. They often spoke of things I did not understand, but yet which must be lovely; now that we are to know these too, curiosity has taken hold of me, and will not let me rest night or day."

"I was quite content before;" said Marlene, sadly. "I was happy, and could have been happy all my life — now it will be different. Do you never hear people complain of care and trouble? and what did we know of care?"

"That was because we did not know the world; and I want to know it, at whatever risk. I too have been contented to grope about with you, and to be left in idleness — but not for ever. I will have no advantage over those who have to work. Sometimes, when my father used to teach us history, and tell us of all the heroes and their doings, I would ask him if any of these were blind? But every man who had done anything to speak of, could see. The like thoughts would keep tormenting me for days. Then, when I was at my music, or was allowed to play the organ in

your father's place, I would forget my grievances. Again, I often thought; 'Am I eternally to play this organ, and walk these few hundred steps about this village here for ever? and beyond this village, never to be heard of by one living soul, or spoken of when I am dead?' You see, since that doctor has been up there at the castle, I have had a hope of growing up to be a man like other men — and to be able to go out into the wide world, and go where I please, and have nobody to mind."

"Not even me, Clement?" She spoke without complaint or reproach, but the boy broke out passionately:

"How can you talk such stuff, which you know I can't abide? Do you think I would go away and leave you all alone? or steal from home in secret? Do you think I could do that?"

"I know how it is. When the village-lads begin their wanderings, or go away to town, nobody ever may go with them, not even their own sisters; and here, while they are children still, the boys run away from the girls whenever they come near them. Till now they let you stay with me, and we learned and played together; you were blind, as I was — what should you have done with other boys? But when you see, and wish to stay with me, they will mock you, and hoot after you, as they do to all who do not hold to them; and then you will go away, for ever so long a time, perhaps — and I — how shall I ever learn to do without you?"

The last words were spoken with an effort, and then her terrors overcame her, and she sobbed aloud.

Clement drew her towards him, and stroked her

cheeks, and said with earnest tenderness: "You must not cry; I am not going to leave you — never — rather remain blind and forget the rest. I will not leave you if it makes you cry so. Come now, be calm; do be glad! — you must not heat yourself, the doctor said; it is not good for the eyes, dear darling Marlene!"

He took her in his arms, and clasped her close, and kissed her cheek — a thing he had never done before. Just then he heard his mother calling to him from the vicarage close by; and leading the still weeping girl to a chair by the wall, and seating her upon it, he hurried out.

Shortly after, a venerable pair might be seen walking down the hill, from the great house towards the village. The vicar, a tall and stately form, with all the power and majesty of an apostle; and the sexton, a simple slight-built man, with humble gait and hair already white. Both had been invited to pass the afternoon with the lord of the manor and the doctor, whom he had sent for from the adjacent town, for the purpose of examining the children's eyes and attempting an operation. The doctor had repeatedly assured the two delighted fathers, that he had every reasonable hope of a perfect cure; and he had requested them to hold themselves in readiness for the morrow.

It was the mother's business to prepare what was needful in the vicarage. The children were not to be parted on the day appointed to restore to both the light, of which, together, they had been so long deprived.

When the two fathers reached their homes (they were opposite neighbours), the vicar gave his old

friend's hand a squeeze, and said, with glistening eyes: "God be with them and us!" — and then they parted. The sexton went into his house, where all was quiet, for the servant-girl was in the garden. He went into his room, rejoicing in the stillness that made him feel alone with his God. But when he crossed the threshold he was startled by his child. She had risen from her chair, holding her handkerchief to her eyes, her bosom heaving, as if in spasms, her cheeks and lips dead white. He sought to comfort her; begging her to be composed, and anxiously enquiring what had happened? Tears were her only answer — tears which, even to herself, she could not have explained.

CHAPTER II.

THE children had been laid in two small rooms with a northern aspect, in the upper story of the vicarage. In default of shutters, the windows had been carefully hung with shawls, making soft twilight of the brightest noonday. The vicar's quiet extensive orchard, while it gave the walls abundant shade, kept off the din of village life beyond.

The doctor had enjoined extreme precaution, for the girl especially. As far as depended upon himself, the operation had proved successful. In solitude and silence, Nature must be left to do the rest. The young girl's temperament was so excitable as to require the utmost care, and most attentive watching.

At the decisive hour Marlene had not flinched; and when her mother had burst into tears on first hearing the doctor's step on the threshold, she had gone up to her to comfort her.

The doctor began the operation with the boy. Though somewhat agitated, he had seated himself bravely, and borne it well. At first he would not suffer himself to be held, and only yielded to Marlene's entreaties. When, for a second, the doctor removed his hand from his unveiled eyes, he had raised a cry of surprise and delight.

Marlene started; then she too proceeded to undergo the ordeal without a murmur. Tears gushed from her

eyes, and she shook from head to foot, hastily tying on the bandage. The doctor helped them to carry her into the adjoining room, for her knees knocked together, and she could hardly stand. There, stretched on her little couch, she had a long alternation of sleep and faintness; while the boy declared himself to be quite well, and only his father's serious orders induced him to go to bed. To go to sleep was not so easy. Confused visions of forms and colors, — colors for the first time, — flitted across his brain; mysterious forms that had as yet been nothing to him, and were now to be so much, if those were right who wished him joy. He asked a thousand questions while his father and mother sat by his bedside — riddles not yet expounded by the deepest science. For what can science tell us, after all, of the hidden springs of life? His father entreated him to be patient; with God's help, ere long, he would be able to resolve these doubts himself; at present, quiet was the one thing needful — especially to Marlene, whom he must not wake by talking. This silenced him, and listening at the wall, he whispered a petition that the door between them might be left ajar, in order that he might hear whether she slept or if she was in pain. When his mother had done his bidding, he lay quite still, and listened to the breathing of his little sleeping friend; and the quiet rhythm as it rose and fell, sang him like a lullaby to sleep.

Thus they lay for hours. The village was much more still than usual. Those who had to pass the vicarage with carts, took every possible precaution against noise. Even the village-children, warned, most likely, by their master, in place of running riot on coming out of school as usual, went quietly by in

couples to their remotest playgrounds, whispering as they passed, and looking up at the house with wistful eyes. The birds alone among the branches did not hush their song. But when did a bird's voice ever vex or weary child of man, be he ever so sorely in need of rest?

Only by the bells of the homebound flocks, were the children at last awakened. The boy's first question was for Marlene, and whether she had been asking for him? He called to her in a suppressed tone, and asked her how she felt? That heavy sleep has not restored her, and her eyes are burning under the slight handkerchief that binds them. But she does violence to her sensations, and forces herself to answer that she feels much better, and to talk cheerfully to Clement, who now gives utterance to all the wildest speculations of his fancy.

Late, when the moon stands high above the woods, a shy small childish hand is heard to knock at the vicarage door. The little village-girls have brought a garland for Marlene; woven from their choicest garden-flowers, and a bunch of them for Clement. When they are brought, the boy's whole countenance lightens up. "Give them my kindest thanks," he begs; "they are such kind good girls! I am not well yet, but when I have my sight, I shall always be on their side, and help them against the boys." When the wreath was brought to Marlene, she pushed it gently from her with her small pale hands. "I cannot have it here," she said; "it makes me faint, dear mother, to have these flowers so near — give these to Clement too."

Again she sank into a sort of feverish slumber; only the healing approach of day brought something

like repose. And the doctor, who came in the morning very early, was able to pronounce her out of danger, which indeed was more than he had hoped for. He sat long by the boy's bedside, listening to his strange questions with a smile, benevolently admonishing him to patience; and, filled with the most sanguine hopes, he left them.

But to be admonished to quiet and patience after one has had a glimpse of the promised land! In each interval of his duties, his father had to go upstairs to that little room and talk. And the door was left ajar, that Marlene too might hear these charming stories. Legends of godly men and women, to whom the Lord had sent most heavy trials, and then withdrawn them. The story of poor Henry, and of that pious little maiden who would have sacrificed herself in her humility; and how God had guided all to the most blissful consummation; and as many of such edifying histories as the worthy pastor could find to unfold.

And when on the good man's lips, story would unconsciously turn to prayer; or his wife would raise her clear voice in a hymn of thanksgiving, Clement would fold his hands and join—but he would so soon break in with fresh enquiries, as to prove his mind to have been far more present with the story than with the song.

Marlene asked no questions; she was kind and cheerful to every one, and no one guessed the thoughts and questions that were working in her mind.

They recovered visibly from day to day; and on the fourth, the doctor allowed them to get up. He himself supported the young girl, as, all weak and trembling, she crept towards the door, where the boy stood

joyously holding out a searching hand for hers, and then holding hers fast, he bid her lean on him, which she did in her usual confiding way.

They paced up and down — he with the perceptions of locality peculiar to the blind, guiding her carefully past the chairs and cupboards that stood against the walls. "How do you feel now?" he asked her. "Well;" she answered again — and always.

"Come," he said; "lean heavier on me; you are so weak. It would do you good to breathe the air, and the scent of the flowery meadows; it is so close and heavy here. Only the doctor says it might be dangerous; our eyes might get sore again, and even blind, if we were to see the light too soon. Ah! now I know the difference between light and darkness! No sound in music is so sweet as that feeling of space about the eyes. It did hurt me rather, I must confess; yet I could have gazed for ever at those bright colors — the pain was so beautiful (you will soon feel it also). But it will be many a long day before we are allowed to enjoy that pleasure. At first, I know I shall do nothing but look all day long. One thing I should like to know, Marlene; they tell us each thing has its color — now what is the color of your face and mine? I should so like to know — bright or dark? Would not it be disagreeable if they should not be bright and fair? I wonder whether I shall know you with my eyes? Now when I only feel with the tip of this little finger, I could distinguish you from every other human being in the world.

"But then! — ah! then we shall have to begin again. We must learn to know each other by sight. Now, I know that your cheeks and hair are soft to

touch — will they be soft to look at? I do so long to know, and have so long to wait!" In this way he would run on, talking unceasingly. How silently she walked by his side, he never noticed. Many of his words sank deep into her heart. It had never yet occurred to her that she should see herself as others saw her — she could hardly fancy that could be. She had heard of mirrors, but she never had been able to understand them. She now imagined that when a seeing person's eyes are opened, his own image must stand before him.

Now as she lay in bed, her mother believing her to be asleep, the words recurred to her again: "It would be disagreeable if we should find our faces dark!" She had heard of ugliness and beauty; she knew that ugly people were generally much pitied, and often less loved. "If I should be ugly," she said to herself, "and he were to care less for me! He used to play with my hair and call it silk — he will never do that now, if he finds me ugly. And he? — if *he* should happen to be ugly, I never would let him feel it — never! I should love him just the same. Yet, no; *he* cannot be ugly — not he. I know he is not." Thus she brooded long, lost in care and curiosity. The weather was hot and close. From the garden the nightingale was heard complaining, while fitful gusts of west wind came rattling at the window-panes. She was all alone in her room. Her mother, who till now had slept beside her, had had her bed removed, to lessen the heat within that narrow space. It was unnecessary to watch her now, they thought, as all feverish symptoms were supposed to have disappeared. This night, however, they did return again,

and kept her tossing restlessly until long after midnight. Then sleep, though sleep dull and broken, had taken pity on her, and come to close her weary eyelids.

Meanwhile the storm that had been encircling the horizon half the day, threatening and growling, had arisen with might, gathered itself just above the wood, and paused — even the wind had ceased. Now a heavy crash of thunder breaks over the young girl's slumbers. She starts up, half dreaming still — what it is she feels or wants, she hardly knows; impelled by some vague terror, she rises to her feet. Her pillows seem to burn her. Standing by her bed, she listens to the pattering rain without; but it does not cool her fevered brow. She tries to collect her thoughts — to remember what had passed. She can recall nothing but those melancholy fancies with which she had fallen asleep. A hasty resolution forms and ripens in her mind. She will go to Clement; he too is alone — what is to prevent her resolving all her doubts at once, by one look at him and at herself? Possessed by this idea, the doctor's injunctions are all forgotten. Just as she had left her couch, with groping trembling hands, she finds the door which stands half open; feeling for the bed, she steals on tiptoe to the sleeper's side; holding her breath, bending forward where he lies, she tears the bandage from her eyes.

But how is she terrified to find that all is as dark as ever. She had forgotten that it was night, and that she had been told night makes all men blind. She had believed it was the light streaming from a seeing eye that lighted up itself and other objects round it. She can distinguish nothing, although she

feels the boy's soft breath upon her eyelids. In distress, almost in despair, she is about to leave the room, when a sudden flash of lightning flames through the now less carefully darkened panes; a second, and then a third — the whole atmosphere seems to surge with lurid light. Thunder and rain increase their roar. But she stands motionless, her rapt gaze fastened on the curly head before her, resting so peacefully upon its pillows. Then the picture begins to fade — the water gushes from her eyes; seized with unutterable terror, she takes refuge in her room, and hastily replacing the bandage, she throws herself upon her bed. She knows — she feels irrevocably — her eyes have looked and seen for the first time — and for the last!

CHAPTER III.

WEEKS have passed — the young powers of these eyes are to be tried by the light of day. The doctor, who, from the adjacent town where he lived, had hitherto directed the children's simple treatment, had come over on a bright unclouded day, to be present, and with his patients to enjoy, the first fruits of his skill.

Green wreaths in lieu of curtains had been hung about the windows, and both rooms festively adorned with flowers and foliage. The baron himself, and from the village the nearer friends of both the families, had assembled to wish parents and children joy, and to rejoice in the happy wonder of the cure.

When Clement, scarlet with delight, was placed before Marlene, and took her hand, in shy terror she had half hidden herself in a corner behind some foliage. He had begged to be allowed to see her first — both bandages had been loosened at the same moment. A cry of speechless rapture had sounded from the boy's lips; he remained rigid on the same spot, a beatified smile upon his lips, turning his flashing eyes on every side. He has forgotten that Marlene was to be placed before him; (he had yet to learn what the human form is like,) and she did nothing to recall it to him. She stood motionless. Only her long lashes quivered over her large clear brown passive eyes. No suspicions were awakened yet. "Those unknown wonders

of sight are strange to her," they said. But when the boy broke out into this sudden rapture, and they said to him, "This is Marlene," and in his old way he had felt for her cheek with his hand, and stroked it, saying, "Your face is bright;" then her tears gushed out. She hastily shook her head, and said, almost inaudibly — "It is all dark; it is just as it always was!"

The horror of that first moment who shall describe? The agitated doctor drew her towards the window, and proceeded to examine her eyes; the pupils were not to be distinguished from seeing ones, save by their lifeless melancholy fixedness. "The nerve is dead!" he said; "some sudden shock, or vivid light must have destroyed it." The sexton's wife turned white, and fell fainting in her husband's arms. Clement could hardly gather what was passing — his mind was filled with the new life given him. But Marlene lay bathed in tears, and returned no answer to the doctor's questions. Nothing was ever learned from her; she could not tell how it had happened, she said; she begged to be forgiven for her childish weeping. She could bear all that was appointed for her — she had never known a happier lot.

Clement was beside himself when the extent of her misfortune was made known to him. "You shall see too!" he cried, running to her; "I do not care to see if you do not! It cannot be so hopeless yet. Ah, now I know what it is you lose! Seeing would be nothing; it is that everybody else has eyes, that look so kindly on us — and so shall you see them look on you! Only have patience, and do not cry!" And then he turned to the doctor, and with tears, implored him to cure Marlene. Large tears stood

in the good doctor's eyes; he could scarcely so far compose himself as to bid the boy first be careful of himself; meanwhile he would see what could be done; he was forced to leave him a ray of hope to spare him dangerous agitation.

From the disconsolate parents, however, he did not withhold the truth.

The boy's grief had been some comfort to Marlene. As she was sitting by the window she called him to her: "You must not be so grieved," she said; "it is the will of God. Rejoice, as I rejoice, that you are cured. You know I never cared so much; I could have been contented as it was. If only father and mother would not mind! — but they will get used to it again, and so will you. If you will only love me just as well now that I am to remain as I was, we may still be very happy."

But he was not so easily to be comforted, and the doctor had to insist on their being parted. Clement was taken into the larger room, where the villagers came pressing round him, shaking hands with him by turns, with cordial words and wishes. The crowd half stunned him, and he only kept repeating: "Marlene is still blind; she will never see! have you heard?" he would say, and burst into tears afresh.

It was high time to tie the bandage on again, and lead him to his own cool quiet room — there he lay exhausted with joy and grief and weeping. His father came to him, and spoke tenderly and piously; which did not much avail him. He cried even in his sleep, and appeared to be disturbed by distressing dreams.

On the following day, however, wonder, joy, and curiosity asserted their rights again; sorrow for Marlene

only appeared to touch him nearly when he had her before his eyes. The first thing in the morning he had been to see her, and with affectionate anxiety to enquire whether she felt no change — no more hopeful symptom? Then he became absorbed in the variegated world that was expanding before his eyes. When he returned to Marlene, it was only to describe some new wonder to her, although sometimes, in his fullest flow of narrative, he would stop suddenly, reminded by a look at the poor little friend beside him, how painful to her his joy must be. But in reality, she did not find it painful. For herself she wanted nothing — listening to the enthusiasm of his delight was joy enough for her. Only when by-and-by he came more rarely, or remained silent, for the reason that all he could have said, appeared as nothing to what he did not dare to say — only then she began to feel uneasy. Hitherto, by day, she had hardly ever been without him, but now she often sat alone. Her mother would come to keep her company; but her mother, once so lively, in losing her dearest hope, had also lost her cheerfulness.

She could find nothing to say to her child save words of comfort, which her own sighs belied, and which therefore could not reach her heart. How much of what the young girl now was suffering had she not foreseen with terror! And yet the feeling of what she had lost, came upon her with pangs of unknown bitterness.

She would still sit spinning in her father's garden, and when Clement came, these poor blind eyes of hers would light up strangely. He was always kind, and would sit beside her, stroking her hair and cheek as

he had done of old. Once she entreated him not to be so silent — she felt no touch of envy when he told her what the world was like, and what it daily taught him; but when he left her to herself, she felt so lonely! Never, by word or look, did she remind him of that evening when he had promised he would never leave her — such hopes as these she had long resigned. And since he had nothing to conceal from her, he appeared to love her twice as well.

In the fullness of his heart, he would sit for hours telling her of the sun and moon and stars; of all the trees and flowers; and especially how their parents looked, and they themselves. To her very heart's core, she felt a thrill of joy, when he innocently told her that she was fairer far than all the village maidens; he described her as tall and slender; with delicately-chiselled features, and dark eyebrows. He had also seen himself, he said, in the glass; but he was not nearly so good-looking — men in general were not, by a great deal, so handsome as women. All this was more than she could quite comprehend; only so much she did: her own looks pleased him, and more than this her heart did not desire.

They did not again return to this topic; but on the beauties of nature he was perfectly inexhaustible. When he was gone, she would recall his words, and feel a kind of jealousy of a world that robbed her of him. In secret this childish feeling grew and strengthened — growing stronger even than the pleasure she had felt in his delight. Above all, she began to hate the sun; for the sun, he told her, was brighter than all created things besides. In her dim conceptions, brightness and beauty were the same; and never did

she feel so disheartened as when, towards evening, he sat beside her, intoxicated with delight, watching the sun go down. Of herself he had never spoken in such words — and did this sight so cause him to forget her that he did not even see the tears that started to her eyes — tears of vexation, and of a curious kind of jealous grievance?

Her heart grew heavier still, when, with the doctor's sanction, the vicar began the education of his son. Before his eyes had been couched, the greater part of his day had been spent in practising his music. Bible teaching, something of history and mathematics, and a trifle of Latin, was all that formerly had been considered needful. In all those lessons, not extending beyond the most conventional acquirements, Marlene had taken a part.

Now that the boy manifested a very decided taste for natural history, his time was filled up in earnest; preparing him for one of the higher classes of a school in the neighbouring town. With a firm unwearying will, and his natural dispositions aiding, he laboured through all that had been omitted in his education, and soon attained the level of his years. For many an hour together, he would sit in the sexton's garden with his book; but there was now no question of their former chat. Marlene felt her twofold loss — her lessons and her friend.

CHAPTER IV.

THE autumn came, and with it a few days' pause in the lad's studies. The vicar had resolved to take his son, before the winter, on an excursion among the mountains; to shew him the hills and dales, and give him a deeper insight into a world that already had seemed so fair, even upon the meagre plains around their village.

When the boy first heard of it; "Marlene must go with us," he said. They attempted to dissuade him, but he refused to go without her. "What if she cannot see?" he said; "The mountain-air is strengthening, and she has been so pale and weak, and she falls into anxious fancies when I am away."

They did his bidding therefore; the young girl was lifted into the carriage beside Clement and his parents, and one short day's journey brought them to the foot of the mountain-chain. Here commenced their wanderings on foot. Patiently the boy conducted his little friend, now more reserved than ever. He often felt a wish to climb some solitary peak that promised a fresh expanse of view, but he led her wherever she wished to go, and would not give up the charge, often as his parents would have relieved him of it.

Only when they had reached a height, or were resting in some shady spot, would he leave the young girl's side; seeking his own path among the most perilous rocks, he would go collecting stones or plants

not to be found below. Then when he returned to the resting party, he had always something to bring Marlene — some berries, a sweet-scented flower, or some soft bird's-nest blown from the trees by the wind.

She would accept them with gentle thanks; she appeared to be more contented than at home, and she really was so, for all day long she breathed the same air with him. But, her foolish jealousies went with her. She felt angry at the mountains, whose autumn glory, as she believed, endeared the world still more to him, and estranged him more from her.

At last the vicar's wife was struck by her strange ways. She would occasionally consult her husband about the child, who was as dear to both as if she had been their own. Her obstinate dejection was attributed by both to the disappointment of her hopes of sight; and yet the young girl felt no pain in losing that which had only been promised to her, or depicted to her fancy — it was all in the loss of what she had already known; of what had been her own.

On the second evening of their journey they halted at a solitary inn, celebrated from its situation close to a waterfall. Their wanderings had been long, and the women were very weary. As soon as they reached the house, the vicar took in his wife before going on farther to the cleft, from whence they already heard the roaring of the water. Marlene was quite exhausted, yet she would persist in following Clement, who felt no want of rest. They climbed the remaining steps, and louder and nearer sounded the tumult of the waters. Midway up the narrow path Marlene's remaining strength gave way. "Let me sit down here," she

said, "while you go on, and fetch me when you have looked long enough." He offered to lead her home before going farther, but she was already seated, so he left her and went on, following the sound; touched at once, and charmed with the solitude and majesty of the spot.

Seated upon a stone, the young girl began to long for his return. "He will never come!" she thought. A chill crept over her, and the dull distant thunder of the falls gave her a shudder.

"Why does he not come?" she said; "he will have forgotten me in his delight, as he always does. If I could only find the way back to the house that I might get warm again!" And so she sat and listened to every distant sound. Now she thought she heard him calling to her; trembling, she rose — what was she to do? Involuntarily she tried a step, but her foot slipped, and she staggered and fell. Fortunately the stones on the path were all overgrown with moss. Still the fall terrified her, and losing all self-command, she screamed for help; but her voice was unable to reach across the chasm to Clement, who was standing on the edge, in the very midst of the uproar, and the house was too far off. A sharp pain cut to her heart, as she lay among the stones, helpless and deserted. Tears of desperation started to her eyes, as she rose with difficulty. What she most dearly loved seemed hateful to her now — her heart was too full of bitterness even to feel that an all-seeing God was nigh. Thus Clement found her; when for her sake he had torn himself with an effort from the spell of so magnificent a scene.

"I am coming!" he called to her from a distance. "It is lucky that you did not come with us — the

place was so narrow, one false step would have been enough to kill you. The water falls so far, deep down, and roars and rushes, and rises again in clouds of spray, it makes one giddy. Only feel how it has powdered me. But how is this? You are cold as ice, and your lips are trembling. Come, it was very wrong of me to leave you sitting out so late in the cold! God forbid that it should make you ill!"

She suffered herself to be led back in perverse silence. The vicar's wife was much alarmed at seeing the child's sweet countenance so distorted and disturbed. They prepared some warm drink for her in haste, and made her go to bed without being able to learn more than that she felt unwell.

And in truth she did feel ill — so ill that she wished to die. Life that had already proved itself so adverse, had also become odious to her. She lay there, giving full vent to her impious rancorous thoughts, wilfully destroying the last links that bound her to her fellow-creatures. "I will go up there to-morrow;" she said to herself, in her dark brooding. "He himself shall take me to the spot where one false step may kill me. My death will not kill him. Why should he have to bear my burden longer? — he has only borne it out of pity."

This guilty thought wound close and closer round her heart. What had become of her natural disposition, so tender and transparent, during those last few months of inward struggle? She even dwelt without remorse on the consequences of her crime. "They will get used to it, as they have got used to my being blind; he will not always have the picture of my misery before his eyes, to spoil his pleasure in this

beautiful world of his!" This last reflexion invariably came to strengthen her resolves, when a doubt would arise to combat them.

The vicar and his wife were in the adjoining room, separated from hers by a thin partition. Clement still lingered out of doors, under the trees; he could not part from the stars and mountains, or shut out the distant music of the waters.

"It distresses me to see how Marlene pines and falls away," said his mother. "If the slightest causes agitate her so, she will be soon worn out. If you would only talk to her, and tell her not to make herself so miserable about a misfortune that cannot be repaired."

"I am afraid it would be useless;" returned the vicar. "If her education, her father's and mother's tenderness, and her daily intercourse with ourselves, have not spoken to her heart, no human words can do so. If she had learned to submit herself to the will of God, she would bear a dispensation that has left her so much to be thankful for, with gratitude, and not with murmurings."

"He has taken much away from her!"

"He has, but not all — not for ever, at least. Now she seems to have lost the faculty of loving; of holding all things as nothing, compared to the love of God and of His creatures. And this faculty only returns to us when we return to God. As she now is, she does not wish to return to Him — her grievances and her discontent are still too dear to her; but the tone of her mind is too healthy to harbour these sad companions long. Sometime, when her heart is feeling most forlorn, God will take possession of it again, and love and charity will resume their former places, and

then there will be light within her, even though it be dark before her eyes."

"God grant it! yet the thought of her future life distresses me."

"She is safe if she does nothing to lose herself. And even if all those who now love and cherish her should be taken from her, charity never dies. And if she take heed to the guiding of the Lord, and the ways it pleaseth Him to lead her, she may yet learn to bless the blindness, that from her infancy has separated her from the shadow, and given her the reality and truth."

Clement interrupted their discourse. "You cannot think how lovely it is to-night!" he cried from the threshold where he stood. "I would gladly give one eye if I could give it to Marlene, that she might see the splendour of the stars. I hope the noise of the waterfall may not prevent her sleeping. I can never forgive myself for having left her to sit out there in the cold."

"Dear boy, speak lower," said his mother; "she is asleep close by. The best thing you can do, I think, would be to go to sleep yourself." And the boy whispered his good-night.

When his mother went to Marlene's room, she found her quiet and apparently asleep—that troubled look had given place to an expression of peace and gentleness.

The tempest was overpast, and had destroyed no vital part. Even remorse and shame were slightly felt. So absolute was the victory of that joyful peace that had been preached in the room beside her. Slowly, and by side-paths, does the principle of evil steal over us, and assume its sway — good asserts its victory at once.

CHAPTER V.

NEXT morning her friends noticed with astonishment the change that had come over her. The vicar's wife could only explain it by supposing Marlene to have overheard their conversation of the night before. "So much the better," said the vicar. "If she has heard it, I have nothing more to say."

After this, the young girl's gentle tenderness towards Clement and his parents, was touching to behold. She only wished to be considered as belonging to them. Any proof of their affection she received with glad surprise; as more than she expected or deserved. She did not talk much, but what she said was gay and animated. In her whole manner there was a softness, an abnegation of herself, that seemed meant for a mute apology. In their wanderings she again took Clement's arm, but she often begged to be allowed to sit down and rest. Not that she was tired; she only wished to give the boy his freedom to climb about whenever he saw anything to tempt him. And when he came back to tell her what he had seen, she would welcome him with a smile. Her jealousy was gone, now that she desired nothing for herself but the pleasure of seeing him pleased.

Thus strengthened and raised to better feelings, she came to the end of her excursion — and the strengthening had come when it was needed. She found her mother laid low by a dangerous disease,

which carried off the delicate woman in a day or two. And after the first few weeks of mourning, she found that her sadly altered life exacted duties of her, for which before she hardly would have been fitted. She busied herself about the household, late and early. She found her way, in spite of her infirmity, into every nook and corner of their small home; and though there were many things she was unable to do herself, she shewed both cleverness and foresight in her arrangements, and in her watchful care that her afflicted father should want for nothing.

She soon acquired a remarkable degree of firmness and quiet dignity. Where formerly repeated admonitions had been necessary, she ruled the men and maids with a gentle word. And if ever any serious instance did occur, of neglect or real ill-will, one earnest look of those large blind eyes would melt the coarsest nature.

Since she had understood that there was work for her to do — that the moulding of their daily life was entirely in her hands, and that it was her duty to be cheerful for her father's sake, she had much less time to feel the pain of Clement's absence; and when he was sent to school in town, she was able to bid him a more composed farewell than any of the others. For some weeks, it is true, she went about the house as though she were in a dream — as though she had been severed from her happier self. But she soon grew gay again, jesting with her father to win him to a laugh, and singing to herself her favourite songs. When the vicar's wife would come with letters, and read the news and messages from Clement, her heart would beat quick in secret; and that night perhaps, she

lay awake for a longer time than usual; but in the morning she would rise serene as ever.

When Clement came home for the holidays, his first steps were to the sexton's house — and his step Marlene knew, — ever so far off. She stood still, and listened whether it was for her he asked; then with her slim hands, she hastily smoothed back her hair, that still hung in its heavy plaits upon her slender neck; then rose and left her work; and by the time he had crossed the threshold, there was not a trace of agitation on her features. Gaily she offered him her hand, and begged him to come in and sit down beside her, and tell her what he had been doing. There he would often forget the hours, and his mother would come after him, for she began to grudge any of his time she lost. He very rarely stayed all his holidays in the village; he would go rambling about the mountains, absorbed by his growing love of nature and of its history.

And so the years rolled on, in monotonous rotation. The old were fading gradually, and the young growing fast in bloom and strength.

Once when Clement came home at Easter, and saw Marlene, as, rising from her spinning-wheel she came to meet him, he was struck with the progress of her loveliness since autumn. "You are quite a grown-up young lady now," he said; "and I too have done with boyhood — only feel my beard, how it has grown over my winter studies. She blushed a little as he took her hand, and passed it across his chin to make her feel the down upon it. And he had more to talk of than he used to have. The master with whom he boarded had daughters, and these daughters had young

companions. She made him describe them to her. "I don't care for girls," he said; "they are so silly, and talk such nonsense. There is only one, Cecilia, whom I don't dislike, because she does not chatter and make those faces the others do to beautify themselves — and what are they all to me? The other evening when I came home, and went into my room, I found a bunch of flowers on the table; I let it lie, and did not even put it in water, though I was sorry for the flowers — but it provoked me, and next day there was such a whispering and tittering amongst the girls! — I felt so cross, I would not speak a word to them. Why can't they let me alone? — I have no time for their nonsense."

When he talked so, Marlene would hang upon his lips, and treasuring up his words, would interweave them with an endless web of her own strange fancies. She might perhaps have been in danger of wasting her youth in fruitless reveries, but she was saved from this by serious sorrows, and cares that were very real. Her father, who had long fulfilled with difficulty the duties of his place, was now struck with paralysis, and lay entirely helpless for one whole year, when his sufferings were put an end to by a second stroke. She never left him for an hour. Even in the holidays which brought Clement, she would not spare the time to talk to him, save when he would come to spend ten minutes in the sick-room.

Thus concentrating her life, she grew more self-denying. She complained to no one, and would have needed no one, had not her blindness prevented her doing everything herself. Her misfortune had been a secret discipline to her, and had taught many a humble

household virtue, that those who see neglect. She kept everything committed to her care in the most scrupulous order. Her neatness was exaggerated, for she had no eyes to see when she had done enough.

Clement was deeply moved when he first saw her trying to wash and dress her helpless father, and carefully combing his thin grey hair. If in that sick-room, her cheek grew somewhat paler, there was a deeper radiance in her large dark eyes, and to her natural distinction, those lowly labours were, in fact, a foil.

The old man died. His successor came to take possession of the house, and at the vicarage Marlene found a kind and hospitable home.

Clement only heard this by letters rarely written, and still more rarely answered. He had gone to a more distant university, and was no longer able to spend all his holidays at home. Now and then he would enclose a few lines to Marlene, in which, contrary to his former custom, he would address her as a child, in a joking tone, that made his father serious and silent, and his mother shake her head. Marlene would have these notes read aloud to her, and listening to them gravely, would carefully keep them. When her father died, he wrote to her a short agitated letter, neither attempting to console her, nor expressing any sorrow; containing only a few earnest entreaties to be careful of her health, to be calm, and to let him know exactly how she was, and what she felt.

At Easter he had been expected, but he did not come; he only wrote that he had found an opportunity, too good to be lost, of accompanying one of the professors on a botanical tour. His father had been satis-

fied, and Marlene at last successful in pacifying his mother.

He came unannounced at Whitsuntide, on foot, with glowing cheeks, unwearied by a long march before break of day — a fine-grown young man. He stepped into the silent house, where his mother was alone and busy, for it was the eve of a great holiday. Surprised, with a cry of joy, she threw herself upon his neck. "You!" she exclaimed, as soon as she had recovered herself, drawing back to gaze upon him, the long absent one, with all her love for him in her eyes. "You forgetful boy, are you come at last? You can find the way back, I see, to your old father and mother! I began to think you only meant to return to us as a full-fledged professor, and who knows whether my poor eyes would have been left open long enough to behold that pleasant sight on earth? But I must not scold you now that you are my own good boy, and are come to bring us a pleasanter Whitsuntide than I have known for years — me, your father, and all of us!" "Mother," he said, "I cannot tell you how glad I am to be at home again. I could not hold out any longer. I don't know how it happened. I had not resolved to come — I only felt I must. One fine morning, instead of going up to college, I found myself without the gates, walking for very life — such journeys in a day as I never took before, though I was always a good pedestrian. Where is my father, and Marlene?"

"Don't you hear him?" said his mother; "he is upstairs in his study." And in fact they heard the old man's heavy tread walking up and down. "It is just as it used to be — that has been his Saturday's

walk all these twenty years I have known him. Marlene is with the labourers in the hayfield — I sent her away that I might be left to do my work in peace. When she is in the house, she would always have me sitting idle in the corner with my hands before me. She must needs do everything herself. We have new men just now, and I am glad that she should look after them a little, until they get accustomed to their work. Won't she be surprised to find you here? Now come, we must go upstairs to father, and let him have a look at you. It will be midday directly. Come along — he won't be angry at your disturbing him."

She led her son after her, still keeping hold of his hand while she slipped up the narrow staircase before him; then softly opening the door, with a sign to Clement, she pushed him forwards while she stepped back. "Here he is at last!" she said; "there you have him!" "Whom?" cried the old man angrily, and started from his meditations; and then he saw his son's bright face beside him radiant in the morning sunshine. He held out his hand: "Clement!" he cried, between surprise and joy, "You here!" "I was homesick, father," said his son, with a warm grasp of the proffered hand. "I am come to stay over the holidays, if there be room for me now that you have Marlene here." "How you talk!" eagerly broke in his mother; "If I had seven sons, I know I should find room for them. But I will leave you to your father now; I have to go about the kitchen, and I must rifle our vegetable-beds, for in town, I doubt they have been spoiling you."

And with that she went, leaving father and son still

standing silently face to face. "I have disturbed you," at length said Clement; "you are in the middle of your sermon." "You can't disturb a man who has already disturbed himself. I have been going about all the morning, turning over my text in my mind, but the seed would not spring up. I have had strange ideas; misgivings I could not master."

He went to the little window that looked upon the church. The way thither was through the churchyard. It lay peacefully before them, with its flowers and its many crosses glittering in the noonday sun. "Come hither, Clement," said the old vicar gently; "come and stand here beside me. Do you see that grave to the left, with the primroses and monthly roses? It is one you never saw before. Do you know who it is sleeps there? It is my dear old friend; our Marlene's father."

He left his son standing at the window, and began pacing up and down the room again; in their silence they only heard his even tread crunching the sand upon the wooden floor; "No one ever knew him as I did;" he said, drawing a deep breath — "Nobody lost so much, in losing him; for he was to no one else what he was to me. What did he know of the world and the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness in the sight of God! What science he possessed was revealed to him — by scripture or by suffering. I know he is blessed now, for he was already blessed on Earth."

After a pause he went on; "Whom have I now to put me to shame, when I have been puffed up? — to save me, when my faith is wavering — to unravel the vexed thoughts that by turns accuse and excuse each other!

This world is growing so terribly wise! What I hear is more than I can understand — what I read my soul rejects, lest it should lead it to perdition. Many there be who lift up their voices, and dream they have the gift of tongues; and behold, it is nought but idle lip-work, and the scorers listen, and rejoice. Ah! my dear old friend, would I were safe, where you are now!"

Clement turned to look at him. He had never so heard his father speak, in the anguish of his soul. He went up to him, trying to find the right words to say. "Don't, my son;" said his father, deprecatingly, "there is nothing you can say to me, that saints have not said better. Do you know, one day, just after his death, I had fallen asleep, here in this very room; night had come with a tempest that awoke me; my heart was heavy, even unto death, when suddenly I saw him — a great light was shining round him, but he appeared in the clothes he usually wore, just as if he were alive. He did not speak, but remained standing at the foot of my bed, calmly looking down upon me. At first it agitated me terribly, I was not worthy of the grace vouchsafed me; of beholding a sainted face. — Only the day after, I felt the peace it had left behind. He did not come again until last night — I had been reading one of those books, written to seduce Man from God, and from the word of God, and had gone to bed in grief and anger, when soon after twelve o'clock, I woke up again, and saw him standing as before, holding an open bible in his hand, printed in golden letters. He pointed to them with his finger; but so great a radiance was streaming from the pages, that I strained my dazzled eyes in vain; I

could not read a line. — I sat up, and bent nearer to him. He stood still, with a look of love and pity in his face; which presently changed to anxiety when he saw that I was trying to read, and could not. Then, blinded by the brightness, my eyes ran over, and he vanished slowly, leaving me in tears." —

He went to the window again, and Clement saw him shudder. "Father!" he said, and took his hand as it hung down limply by his side — he found it cold and damp — "dear Father, you distress me! You are ill — you should send for a doctor."

"A Doctor?" cried his father, almost violently, drawing himself up to his full height — "I am well, and that is the worst of it. My soul feels, longs for, approaching death, while my body is still obstinately rebellious."

"These dreams are destroying you, father."

"Dreams! I tell you, I was as wide awake as I am now."

"I do not doubt it, father; you were awake, and that is just what makes me so uneasy. It is fever that gives you those waking dreams, the very memory of which distresses you enough to quicken your pulse and make you ill. I need not be a doctor to know that last night you were in a fever, as you are now."

"To know! and what do you think you know, poor mortal that you are! Oh admirable wisdom! — Grace-giving science! — but after all, whom do I accuse? What do I deserve? — for babbling of God's most precious mysteries, and baring my aching heart as a mark for scorners. Are these the fruits of all your studies? What grapes do you hope to gather from thorns like these? I know you well, poor vain creatures that you

are, who would set up new Gods for others, while in your hearts you worship no gods but yourselves; I tell you, your days are numbered." — His bald brow was flushed crimson as he turned to go, without one look at Clement, who stood shocked and silent, his eyes fixed on the floor. Suddenly he felt his father's hand upon his shoulder:

"Speak truth, my son; do you really hold to those of whose opinions I have read with horror? Are you among those bright votaries of matter, who jest at miracles; to whom the Spirit is as a fable which nature tells, and man listens to with scorn. If your youth could not choke these weeds, was the seed of gratitude sown by the Lord in your heart in vain?"

"Father," said the young man after some consideration, "how shall I answer you? I am ready to stake my life on the solution of these questions — I have heard them answered in so many different ways by men I love and honor. Some of my dearest friends profess the opinions you condemn: I listen and learn, and have not yet ventured to decide."

"He who is not with me, is against me, saith the Lord —"

"No, I could not be against Him — I could not strive against the Spirit. Who does deny the Spirit? even among those who would bind it to the laws of matter? — Are not its miracles the same, even if they be no more than nature's fairest blossoms? Is a noble image to be scorned, for only being of stone?"

"You talk as they all do; your heads are darkened by your own dim metaphors — you are so deafened with the sound of your empty words, that the small

voice within you speaks unheard — and is it thus you come to celebrate our Whitsuntide?"

"I came because I loved you —"

There was silence again between them. The old vicar's lips parted more than once, as if to speak, and firmly closed again. They heard Marlene's voice below, and Clement left the window at which he had been sorrowfully standing. "It is Marlene," his father said: "Have you forgotten her? Among your profane associates who vie with each other in their reckless folly and deny the Spirit and the liberty of the Spirit — the freedom of God's adoption — did the memory of your young playfellow never come to remind you of the wonders the Spirit can work, when severed from outward sense; and of the strength God's grace can give to a humble heart that is firm in Faith?"

Clement kept back the answer that was on his lips, for he heard the blind girl's light step upon the stairs. — The door opened, and she stood on the threshold with blushing cheeks. "Clement!" she cried, turning her gentle eyes to the spot where he actually stood. He went up to her, and took the hand she held out waiting for him. "How glad you have made your parents! Welcome, welcome! a thousand welcomes! but why are you so silent?" she added.

"Yes, dear child," he said, "I am here — I wanted so much to see you all again; and how well you look! You have grown taller."

"The spring has set me up again — this winter was very hard to bear — but your parents are so good to me, Clement. — Good morning, father dear;" she said, turning to him — "It was so early when we went

out to the field, that I could not come up to shake hands then" — and she held out hers to him.

"Go downstairs now, dear child, and take Clement with you. You can shew him your garden — you have a little while to yourselves yet before dinner; and you, Clement, think over what I have been saying to you." — And then the young people went away.

"What is the matter with your father?" said the young girl, when they had got downstairs — "his tone sounded rather strange, and so does yours. Have you had any angry words together?"

"I found him very much excited; his blood appears to be in a disordered state. Has he been complaining again of late?"

"Not to me. He sometimes appeared to be ill at ease, and would not speak for hours together, so as often to surprise our mother. Was he severe on you just now?"

"We had a discussion upon very serious subjects. He questioned me, and I could not conceal my convictions."

Marlene grew pensive, and her countenance only brightened when they got into the fresh air.

"Is it not pleasant here?" She asked, stretching out both hands.

"Indeed I hardly know the place again," he said; "what have you done to this neglected little spot? As far back as I can remember, there never was anything here but a few fruit-trees, and the hollyhocks and asters, and now it is all over roses."

"Yes," she said; "your mother never used to care much about the garden, and now she likes it too. The bailiff's son learned gardening in the town, and he made

me a present of some rose-trees, and planted them for me — by degrees I got the others, and now I am quite rich. The finest are not in flower yet."

"And can you take care of them all yourself?"

"Do you wonder at that, because I cannot see?" she said, merrily; "but all the same, I understand them very well, and I know what is good for them — I can tell by the scent, which of them are fading, and which are opening, and whether they are in want of water — they seem to speak to me. Only I cannot gather one for you; I tear my hands so with the thorns."

"Let me gather one for you;" he said, and broke off a monthly rose — she took it — but — "You have broken off too many buds," she said — "I will keep this one to put in water, and there is the full blown rose for you."

They walked up and down the neatly kept path, until they were called to dinner — Clement felt embarrassed with his father — but Marlene, generally so modest in the part she took in conversation, now found a thousand things to ask and say. And thus the vicar forgot the painful feeling left by that first meeting with his son, and the old footing of cordiality was soon resumed.

In the course of the next few days, however, they could not fail to find occasion to revive their quarrel. When his father enquired about the present state of theology at that University, Clement endeavoured to turn the conversation to general subjects; but the farther he retreated, the hotter grew his father in pursuit. Often an anxious, and sometimes an indignant look from his mother, would come to support him in his resolution to avoid all plain speaking on this subject; but

whenever he broke off, or was forced to say a thing that to him meant nothing, the awkward silence fell upon his spirits, and chilled him to the heart. Marlene only was always able to recover the proper tone. But he saw that she too was grieved, and therefore he avoided her when she was alone. He knew that she would question him, and from her he could have concealed nothing. A shade came over him now whenever he saw her. Was it the memory of that childish promise he had long since broken? Was it the feeling that in the schism of opinion that threatened to estrange him from his parents she remained standing on their side?

And yet he felt his tenderness for her more irresistibly than ever; it was a thing he found impossible to deny, but which he did strive most resolutely to conquer. He was too much absorbed in study and in his visions of the future, not to struggle with the energy of an aspiring nature against everything that might cling to his steps, or eventually chance to clog them.

"I have to be a traveller," he said: "a traveller on foot — my bundle must be light." He felt strangely burthened when he thought of binding himself to a wife who would have a claim to a large share of his life; and a blind one too, whom he would feel it wrong to leave. Here in her native village, where everything wore the simple aspect she had known from childhood, she was secure from the embarrassments which a residence in a town must inevitably have produced; and so he persuaded himself that he should do her a wrong by drawing closer to her. That he could be causing pain by this self-denial of his, was more than he could trust himself to believe.

His measures became more decisive. On the last day of his stay, after he had embraced his parents, and heard that Marlene was in the garden, he only left a farewell message for her, and with a beating heart he took the road to the village, and then turned down a path across the fields, to reach the woods. But the vicarage garden also opened to these fields, and the nearest way to them would have been through its small wicket gate. It was a long way round he had preferred, but at the last, he could not make up his mind to go farther on his narrow way through the young corn, without at least, one pause of retrospection.

He stood still in the serene sunshine, looking towards the hamlet with its cottages and houses — behind the hedge that bounded his father's garden, he caught sight of the young girl's slender figure. Her face was turned his way, but she had no perception of his presence.

His tears sprang quick and hot, but he struggled and overcame them; then, leaping wildly over banks and ditches, he reached the hedge; she started: "Farewell, Marlene! I am going. I may be away for a year;" and he passed his hand over her hair and forehead. "Good-bye!" — "You are going?" she said; "one thing I should like to ask of you — write oftener; — do! — your mother needs it, and sometimes send me a little message."

"I will;" he said in an absent way — and again he went. "Clement!" — she called after him — he heard, but he did not look back. "It is well that he did not hear me," she murmured; "what could I have found to say to him?"

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER this Clement never made a stay of any length in his father's house. Each time he came, he found him harsher and more intolerant. His mother was tender and loving as before, but more reserved: Marlene was calm, but mute whenever they became earnest in discussion. At such times she would rather avoid being present.

On a bright day towards the end of autumn, we find Clement again in the small room where, as a boy, he had spent those weeks of convalescence. One of his friends and fellow-students, had accompanied him home. They had gone through their course at the University, and had just returned from a longer tour than usual, during which Wolf had fallen ill, and had desired to come hither to recover in the quiet of village life. Clement could not but acquiesce, though of all the young men he knew, Wolf was the one, he thought, least likely to please his father. But, contrary to his expectations, the stranger prudently and cleverly contrived to adapt himself perfectly to the opinions of the old couple; especially winning the mother's good will, by the merry interest he manifested in household matters. He gave her good advice, and even succeeded in curing her of some little ailment with a very simple remedy. He had been preparing himself to follow his uncle in his business as apothecary: an avocation far beneath that for which his natural talents

and acquirements would have fitted him; but he was by nature indolent, and was quite contented to settle down, and eat his cake betimes.

Mentally, he never had had anything in common with Clement; and on first coming to the vicarage, he had felt himself in an atmosphere so oppressive and uncongenial, that he would have left it, after the most superficial recovery, had not the blind girl, from the first moment he saw her, appeared to him as a riddle worth his reading.

She had avoided him as much as possible; the first time he had taken her hand she had withdrawn it, with unaccountable uneasiness, and had entirely lost the usual composure of her manner. Yet he would remain in her society for hours, studying her method of apprehending things, and with a playful kind of importunity which it was not easy to take amiss, taking note of her ways and means of communication with the outer world.

He could not understand why Clement appeared to care for her so little — and Clement would avoid her more than ever when he saw her in company with Wolf. He would turn pale then, and escape to the distant forest, where the villagers would often meet him, plunged in most disconsolate meditations.

One evening, when he was returning from a long discontented walk, where he had gone too far and lost himself, he met Wolf in a state of more than natural excitement. He had been paying a long visit to Marlene, who had fascinated him more than usual; he had then found his way to the village tavern, where he had drunk enough of the light wine of the country to make

him glad of a cool walk among the fields in the fresh evening air.

"I say!" he called to Clement. "It may be a good while yet, before you are so fortunate as to get rid of me; that little blind witch of yours is a pretty puzzle to me. She is cleverer than a dozen of our town ladies, who only use their eyes to ogle God and man — and then that delicious way she has of snubbing me, is a master-piece in itself."

"You may be glad if she ends by making you a little tamer;" said Clement shortly.

"Tamer! that I shall never be — and that magnificent figure and lovely face of hers are not calculated to make a fellow tame. Don't believe I mean to harm her. Only you know, sometimes, I think if she were to be fond of one, there would be something peculiar in it. A woman who can't see — who can only feel, and feel as no other creature can — I say if such a woman were to fall upon a fellow's neck, I say, the feeling might prove especially pleasant to them both."

"And I say, you had better keep your sayings to yourself."

"Why? where's the harm? what harm would there be in making her fall just a very little bit in love with me, to see how her nerves would carry her through the scrape? In general so much fire finds its safety valve in the eyes, but here — —"

"I must beg you to refrain from making any such experiments," flared up Clement. "I tell you very seriously, that I do not choose to see or hear anything of the kind, and so you may act accordingly."

Wolf gave a sidelong look at him, and, taking hold

of his arm, said with a laugh: "I do believe you really are in love with the girl, and want to try a few experiments yourself. How long have you been so scrupulous? You have often heard me out, before now, when I have told you what I thought of women."

"Your education is no concern of mine. What have I to do with your unclean ideas? But when I find them soiling one so near and dear to me, one who is twenty times too good for you to breathe the same air, that is what I can and will prevent."

"Oho!" said Wolf tranquilly — "too good you say? too good? It is you who are too good a fellow Clement, far too good! so take yourself away, out of my air, good lad."

He clapped him on the back, and would have moved on — Clement stood still, and turned white; "You will be so good as to explain the meaning of those words;" he said resolutely.

"No such fool; ask others if you wish to know — others may be fond of preaching to deaf ears; I am not."

"What others? What do you mean? Who is it dares to speak slightly of her? I say who dares?" He held Wolf with an iron grasp.

"Foolish fellow, you are spoiling my walk," he growled, "with your stupid questions; let me go, will you?"

"You do not stir a step until you have given me satisfaction," cried Clement, getting furious.

"Don't I? Go to the bailiff's son if you are jealous! Poor devil! to coax him so, till he was ready to jump out of his skin for her, and then to throw him over! Fie! was it honest? He came to pour out his grievances

to me, and I comforted him. She is just what all women are, says I, a coquette. It is my turn now, but we are up to a thing or two, you know, and may not be inclined to let our mouths be stopped, when we would warn other fellows from falling into the same snare."

"Retract those words!" shouted Clement, shaking Wolf's arm in a paroxysm of rage.

"Why retract? if they are true, and I can prove them? Go to! you are but a simpleton!"

"And you a devil."

"Oho! I say, it may be your turn to retract now."

"I won't retract."

"Then I suppose you know the consequences. You shall hear from me as soon as I get to town."

And having thus spoken in cold blood, he turned back to the village. Clement remained standing where he was.

"Villain! — miserable scoundrel!" — fell from his lips; his bosom heaved, a cruel pain had coiled itself about his heart, he flung himself flat upon the ground among the corn, and lay there long, recalling a thousand times each one of those words that had made him feel so furious.

When he came home at a very late hour, he was surprised to find the family still assembled. Wolf was missing. The vicar was pacing violently up and down the room. His wife and Marlene were seated with their work in their laps, much against their custom at so late an hour. On Clement's entrance the vicar stopped, and gravely turned to look at him.

"What have you been doing to your friend? — Here he has packed up and gone, while we were all

out walking, leaving a hasty message. When we came home, we only found the man who had come to fetch his things. Have you been quarrelling? else why should he be in such a hurry?"

"We had high words together. I am glad to find that he is gone, and that I shall not have to sleep another night under the same roof with him."

"And what were your angry words about?"

"I cannot tell you, father. I should have been glad to avoid a quarrel, but there are things to which no honest man can listen. I have long known him to be coarse, and careless in feeling, both with regard to himself, and others, but I never saw him as he was to-day."

The vicar looked steadily at his son, and then in a low tone: "How do you mean to settle this quarrel between you?" he asked.

"As young men do;" said Clement gravely.

"And do you know what Christians do, when they have been offended?"

"I know, but I cannot do the same; if he had only offended me, I might easily have forgiven him, but he has insulted one who is very dear to me."

"A woman, Clement?"

"A woman. Yes."

"And you love this woman?"

"I love her;" murmured the young man.

"I thought so," burst out his father. "Yes! you have been corrupted in the town. You are become as the children of this world, who follow wanton wenches, fight for them, and make idols of them; but I tell you, while I live, I shall labour to win you back to God. I will smash your idols. Did the Lord vouchsafe to

work a miracle for you, for you to deny him now? Far better have remained in darkness, with those gates closed for ever, through which the devil and all his snares have entered in, and taken possession of your heart!"

The young man had some struggle to suppress his rising passion. "Who gave you the right, father, to suppose my inclinations to be so base?" he said. "Am I degraded, because I am forced to do what is needful in the world we live in, to crush the insolence of the base? There are divers ways of wrestling with the evil one; yours is the peaceful way, for you have the multitude to deal with. I have the individual, and I know that way."

"It is a way you shall not go," hotly returned the father; "I say you shall not trample on God's commandments. He is no son of mine, who would do violence to his brother. I prohibit it with the authority of a parent and a priest. Beware of setting that authority at naught!"

"And so you spurn me from your home;" said Clement gloomily. A pause ensued. His mother, who had burst into tears, now rose, and rushed up to her son. "Mother," he said earnestly, "I must be a man. I cannot be a traitor." He went towards the door, with one look at Marlene, whose poor blind eyes were searching painfully; his mother followed him — she could not speak for sobbing. "Do not detain him, wife," said the vicar, "he is no child of ours, since he refuses to be God's; let him go whither he pleases, to us, he is as dead."

Marlene heard the door close and the vicar's wife fall heavily to the ground, with a cry that came from

the depths of her mother's heart. She woke from the trance in which she had been sitting, went to the door, and with an immense exertion, she carried the insensible woman to her bed. The vicar stood at the window and never uttered a word; but his folded hands were trembling violently.

About a quarter of an hour later, a knock came to Clement's door. He opened it and saw Marlene. — She entered quietly. The room was in disorder — she struck her foot against the trunk. "What are you going to do, Clement?"

The stubbornness of his grief softened at once, and he took her hands and pressed them to his eyes which were wet with tears. "I must do it;" he cried, "I have long felt that I have lost his love. Perhaps when I am gone, he may feel that I have never ceased to be his son."

She raised him up, and said; "Do not weep, or I shall never have strength to tell you what I have to say. Your mother would say the same if your father did not prevent her. And even he, — I heard by his voice how difficult he found it to be so hard; yet hard he will remain — for I know him well — he believes that he is serving the Lord by being severe, and serving him best, in sacrificing his own heart."

"And you think the same?"

"No, I don't, Clement. — I don't know much about the world, nor the laws of that opinion that forces a man to fight a duel; but I do know you enough to know that every one of your thoughts and actions — and therefore this duel also — is submitted to the severest test of self-examination. You may owe it to the world, and to her you love; only I think you owe

your parents more than either. I do not know the person who has been insulted, and do not quite feel why it should make you so indignant, to be prevented doing this for her. Do not interrupt me. Do not suppose me to be influenced by the fear of losing any remnant of our friendship which you may have retained during the years that have parted us. I would be willing to let her have you all to herself, if she be able to make you happy, but not even for her sake should you do what you are about to do, were she dearer to you than either father or mother. From their house you must not go in anger, at the risk of its being closed to you for ever. Your father is old, and will carry his opinions with him to the grave. If he were to give way to you, it would be at the sacrifice of principles which are the very pith and marrow of his life; and the sacrifice on your side, would be merely the evanescent estimation in which you believe yourself to be held by strangers. If a woman whom you love, could break with you because you are unwilling to embitter the last years of your father's life, that woman, I say, was never worthy of you."

Her voice failed her; he threw himself on a chair and groaned.

She was still standing by the door, waiting to hear what he would say; and there was a strange look of tension about her brow — she seemed to be listening with her eyes. Suddenly he sprang to his feet, laid his two hands on her shoulders, and cried: "It was for you I would have done this, and now for your sake I will not do it;" and rushing past her, he ran downstairs.

She remained where she was. His last words had

thrilled to her very marrow, and a sudden tide of gladness broke over that timid doubting heart of hers. She sat down on the portmanteau trembling all over. "It was for you! for you!" — the words echoed in her ear. She half dreaded his return; if he should not mean what she thought! and how could he mean it? — What was she to him?

She heard him coming upstairs again; in her agitation she rose, and would have left the room, but he met her at the door, and taking her in his arms, he told her all.

"It was I who was blind," he cried, "and you who saw — who saw prophetically. Without you, where should I have been now? — An orphan without a future, without a home; banished from the only hearts I love, and by my own miserable delusions. And now — now they are all my own again; mine and more than I ever believed to be mine — more than I could have trusted myself to possess."

She hung upon his neck in mute devotion; mute for very scorn of the poverty of language. The long repressed fervour of her affection had broken loose, and burned in her silent kiss.

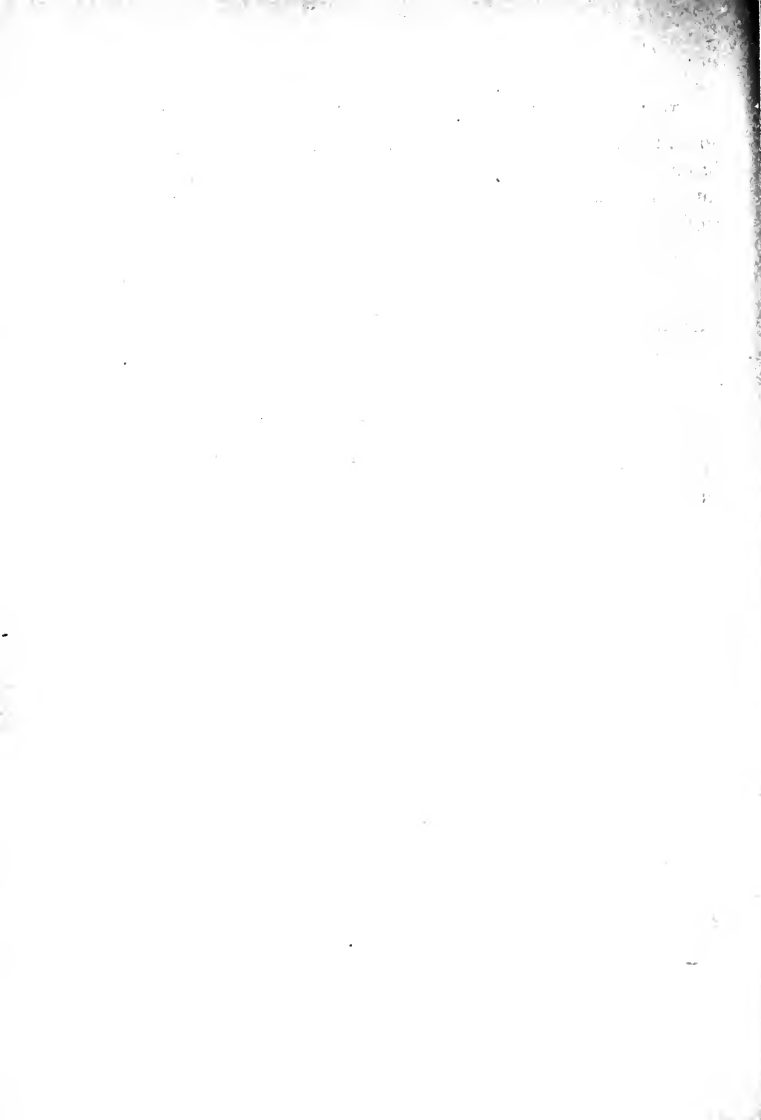
Day dawned upon their happiness. Now he knew what she had so obstinately concealed, and what this very room had witnessed; where now, pledged to each other for life with a grasp of each other's hands, they parted in the early morning.

In the course of the day a letter came from Wolf, written the night before, from the nearest village. Clement might be at rest, he wrote; he retracted everything; he knew best that what he had said was nonsense. He had spoken in anger and in wine.

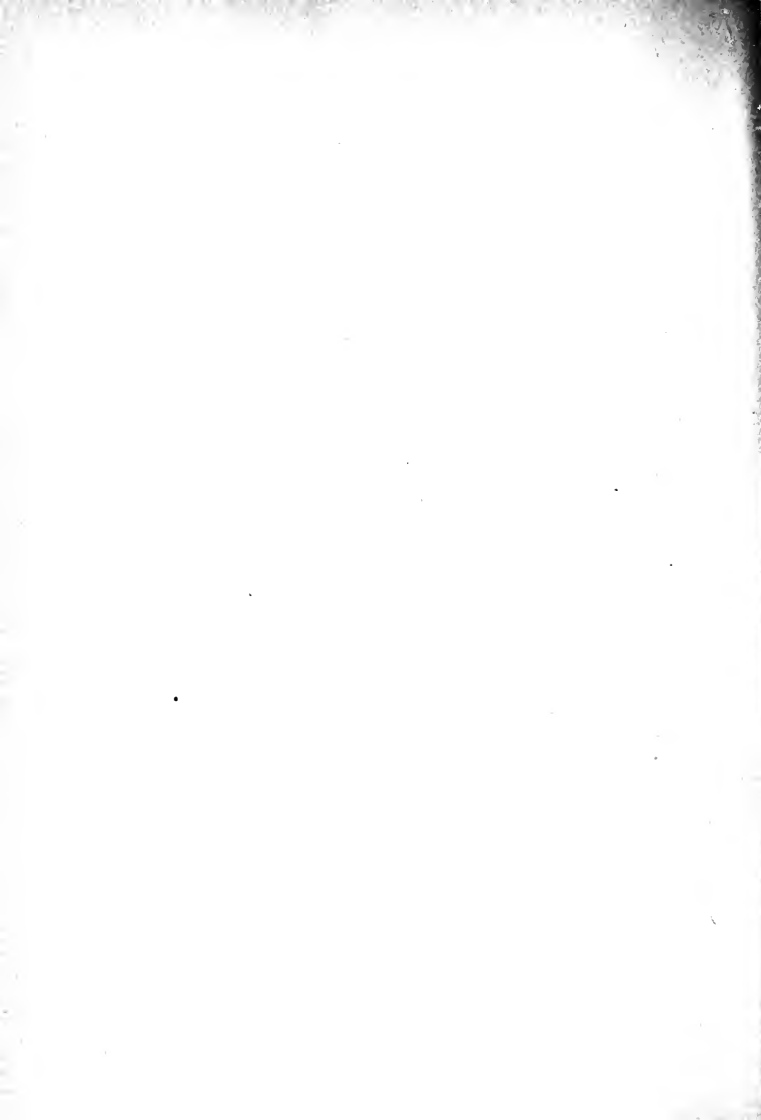
It had provoked him to see Clement going about so indifferent and cool, when, with a word, he might have taken possession of such a treasure — and when he saw that Clement really did mean to do so, he had reviled what had been denied to him.

He begged Clement not to think worse of him than he deserved, and to make his excuses to the young girl and to his parents; and not to break with him entirely, and for ever.

When Clement read this to Marlene, she was rather touched: "I can be sorry for him now," she said; "though I always felt uneasy when he was here — and how much he might have spared us both, and spared himself! But I can think of him with charity now — we have so much to thank him for!" —



WALTER'S LITTLE MOTHER.



WALTER'S LITTLE MOTHER.

ON a still spring night, that had followed on a stormy day, a young woman sat alone by her little lamp, watching and wakeful, although in every other room of that old house, the lights had been put out above an hour before.

It was in a narrow street of a little northern town, and not a footstep was to be heard, save the watchman's, who stopped from time to time, under the one lighted window, to sing out with especial emphasis, his warning to be careful of fire and light. The casement was not closed, and the lamp flickered in the night wind, that blew chill into the room, stealing as it passed, the fragrance of the hyacinths that were blooming in the window. But the girl did not close the casement; she only drew her large brown shawl still closer about her shoulders, and remained pensively looking over the book on her lap, towards the sleeping town beyond; listening to the clock upon the tower as it struck the successive quarters.

Opposite the deep old arm-chair in which she was reclining, a table had been laid with a clean white cloth, and a little tea-kettle was singing merrily beside a simple supper of cold meats, set out with a dainty neatness that almost amounted to elegance. An arm-chair had been drawn close to the single cover.

There was no other symptom of petticoat government in that large low room. Discolored copper-plates, sketches in oils, fragments of antique marbles, covered the walls, and lay about encumbering the furniture, in artistical confusion. An old stove of green pottery had been crowned by a Corinthian capital, blackened by the smoke and dust of years. Now, at this quiet hour of the night, when the lamp in the centre left the corners of the room in darkness, this motley assemblage almost haunted one. The most incongruous things had been placed so close together, as to make them all look strange.

The clock struck eleven. With a movement of impatience, the young woman rose, and throwing down the little blue volume of which she had been absently turning over the leaves, she went to the window and looked out. Her earliest youth was past, and her countenance bore the stamp of a resolute soul, that has suffered, and struggled, and ended by becoming indifferent to evanescent charms. Yet if you looked longer at that serious face, you could see that such charms had been intended for it when Nature cast those features; but that life and fate had been too hard for her, and blighted their original promise. Eyes and brow were of the purest cut; the contour of cheek and throat was broad and sweeping. Even a slight trace of the small-pox here and there, had not deteriorated from the delicacy of her profile. One breath of youthfulness, of gladness, of carelessness, and that severe mouth would have softened into loveliness.

Even now, her countenance completely changed, as her watchful ear at last discerned the echo of a foot-step on the pavement, coming up to the door, and a

suppressed voice, humming a valse tune, as the key was being turned in the lock.

"At last!" she murmured, as she drew back from the window; "and late enough; — and what can make him sing? A glass too much, perhaps, and for all my pains and patience, I shall only have to preach him sober."

She listened to the step upon the stairs, it was steady, elastic, noiseless. "Not so bad after all," she said, with a sigh of relief, "but that he should have taken to singing —?"

The door opened, and a fine-grown young fellow of about nineteen came in, with a kindly salutation.

"How are you, little mother?" he said, taking off his cap, and smoothing back the tangles of his thick flaxen hair. "Why did you sit up for me? I told you I should be late. It was our last dancing lesson for the winter, and they made a sort of ball of it. If some of our young ladies and gentlemen had not been of such very tender years, we should have been at it still. But not a few of our partners were prematurely carried off, by their respective nursery maids; — a fact they would not have owned for worlds — and so we had to break up without dancing in the morning. You have been nodding a bit, I hope?"

"Not I, my son," she said, in a quiet tone. "Care keeps mothers awake at home, when grown-up sons and daughters go racketing to balls and parties. However I believe I should have done wiser in going to bed, than in sitting up here with my teapot, waiting for light-footed young gentlemen who, I perceive, have already quenched their thirst at a less insipid tap than my domestic teapot."

"You perceive, do you little mother?" he answered gaily, disposing of his long limbs under the little table as well as their length admitted of; "and how do you perceive that?"

"This how: you never walked home singing in your life before; and we cannot attribute any ordinary cause, to an effort of nature so extraordinary as to produce what it never had. To be sure, the production was accordingly."

He laughed. "What a wonderfully sagacious little mother! your perceptions are correct as far as you see, but you don't see far enough. I confess to some disturbance somewhere, but not in the upper works, as you suppose. His worship the burgermeister's mild punch is brewed with far too careful a consideration of the tender years of upper tertia, to do much mischief among us other fellows. Altogether, the refreshments affect the sober system, and I am afraid your provender here will have to suffer for it. I abominate the trash and sweet-stuff they feed a fellow with at parties. Come, little mother, just give us a spoonful more rum in this tea, and cure one giddiness with another. For, as I said before, there *is* something wrong about me. I *am* hard hit."

He looked at her in mock distress, with a saucy sparkle in his deep blue eyes. "Walter," she began, in some dismay, "what have you been about? I trust you have not ——?"

The young fellow helped himself to a slice of bread and meat, and fell to his supper with a ponderous gravity, that was meant to cover a shade of embarrassment.

"I suppose no man can escape his fate," he said, chewing away with prosaic complacency; "sooner or later, there always must be a first time; and when a fellow comes to be nineteen, it becomes an affair of *amour propre* to do as others do, and fall in —" he hesitated and she laughed.

"In love? — I do believe this foolish fellow is trying to persuade himself and me, that he has fallen in love!"

"No less;" returned the lad, swallowing the tea she had poured out for him at a gulp; "I am afraid there is every symptom of that fatal malady."

"Most prominent symptoms: a very unusual appetite; and twelve bars of a valse, sung so false, as to make the very muscle model in the corner stop his ears, if he could move his hands. May I enquire to whom these miracles are to be attributed?"

A sly look of mystery came over his bright face; of which indeed the chief charm was this first freshness and frankness of early youth.

"Guess," he said; "you see at present I am too intent on filling my mouth, for any very coherent confession to come out of it."

And he fell to work again, and filled his plate, and cut large pieces off a bright pink ham. She had drawn her arm-chair close to the table, and looked quietly into his eyes.

"As if there were much to guess! — when one has the honor of knowing every one of the young ladies, and more of their giddy partner and his strong points (and his weak ones) — than he himself! — and we know him to be an aspiring young man, for whom the best of all things is but just good enough — and in

every thing that beguiles young fools to folly, who is there among our maidens that can vie with the daughter of our most worshipful and puissant Burgermeister? — Did I not lay hands on a certain drawing board a few days ago, that was ornamented with the name of Flora in choicest arabesques?"

"Your tea is strong, little mother, but your prophetic sense is weak;" said the young man with an affectation of pomposity; "of course I do not attempt to deny" — he proceeded with a passing blush — "that I really did at one time admire that smooth-faced little viper, who can slip so cleverly through a thousand things that would pose a man — and besides I may as well confess that I felt less provoked at my own mistakes, because it amused me to persuade myself that it was love that made me stupid, as it has made many a cleverer man before me. But to-night my eyes were opened, and I saw that between us two there never could be any question of love. If a certain muslin dress were but transparent enough for us to look into her left side, we should discover nothing, I lay my life, but a pair of ball-tablets and the last No. of the 'Modes'."

"And may I enquire what there is to justify a young gentleman in harbouring such dire suspicions? Is a helpless young woman to be argued out of her heart, simply because she may not hold it ready when certain persons ask her."

"Proofs — we have proofs of what we advance;" returned the lad very seriously; "I do not profess to be any very extraordinary judge of character — in fact I suffered myself to be made a fool of for a time. All this winter, you should have seen how this little Dalilah

walked round my beard, — to use a figure of speech, for this trifle of yellow down is barely enough to swear by yet.

Though I do dance deplorably, and never know whether it is a valse or schottisch, or whether I am to begin with the right foot or the left, still I was the acknowledged favorite. I was the eldest and biggest of the company, and might be looked upon as a full-grown man and champion." "A pike among the small fry;" observed his listener.

"As you please; she took me as full measure, and I let her — There *are* feminine perceptions," and he smiled good-humouredly, "which would fail to discern my manhood, even if I were to grow right through the ceiling, and look down upon them from the mazes of a bristling beard."

"Certainly," she retorted; "you are my own little Walter, and will be, if you live to be a grandfather. I shall always feel maternally responsible for your faults and follies — and there is every prospect of your keeping these maternal feelings in practice to the last day of your life."

"Very possibly;" and he laughed again. "But to-day I really did do you credit, I assure you, and was an honor to my education. Our ball queen, you must know, proud minx! found me all at once too mean for even the meanest services of her slaves. There was a young gentleman from the bar, who had been so condescending as to join us. When I came in, with my plain frock-coat and cotton gloves, he was pleased to take his eye-glass, and to stare at me from head to foot. He was in tails, and light-coloured kids, and naturally took the shine out of me, and

would you have believed it? — she would hardly vouchsafe to let me take the tips of her fingers! — Oh! woman! woman, false and fair — —”

“No sweeping condemnations, I beg.”

“Oh! no. Heaven forbid! Of course there are angels among Eve’s daughters. Some — angels with flaming swords. Others — simply angels, wearing their little wings neatly folded under innocent muslin dresses —”

“As — for instance —?”

“While I was still standing, turning to stone at the assertion that Fräulein Flora had already disposed of all her dances, my indignant eye chanced to light upon a face I had overlooked before — perhaps because it could not ogle and grin as some can — and now I saw a pair of large soft eyes pitifully fixed on mine, which seemed to say: ‘Why did you never look our way before? — we could have warned you long ago, to beware of icebergs,’ &c. &c. — all that eyes can say. So I resolved to be a fool no longer, and I walked across the room, look you, with a dignity —”

“I see!” — she interrupted drily; “I see him, as he walks over half a dozen dresses, turning over as many chairs as he could find in his way.”

“Not this time, you unnatural mother, who are always ready to believe the worst of your own son! I tell you, I walked up to Lottchen Klas with the dignity of a prince —”

“Lottchen Klas, is it? A mother’s blessing on your choice, my son!” she said with great solemnity. “If this be your first love, it is not of a disquieting nature. This is not likely to prove too absorbing — this will scarcely keep you from better things. I only beg

you will put no nonsense into that poor child's head, do you hear?"

"I don't know what you take me for," he said with honest naiveté. "I did not say a word to her that I might not as well have said to a woman of seventy."

"She will have been much edified by your conversation."

"Hm; —" he said; "*she* began — she seemed to see that I could not be contented to go on poking here, and never be more than a very middling house-painter or decorator — that I had rather do anything, or go anywhere, to get to a proper school, and have an architect's education. How she knew, I can't say, but she began —"

"And you could not leave off, as I know you."

"Of course not, and she didn't want to; *she* did not find it tiresome; and then, between whiles, we danced; and I never thought I had been so clever at it. You can't think how well she managed to keep me in order; so that we hardly ever got out of time, and got through the quadrille part of the business with only one very small confusion. Ah! she is a sweet creature! and divinely good! — and I really don't believe I ever could find a more suitable opportunity to fall in love. Look here," — and he pulled out a handful of bows and cotillion badges from his waistcoat: "All these are to be put in the fire. Only this one crimson bow was hers: and this is to be carefully kept, and laid under my pillow to-night, and I am much mistaken if I do not find myself over head and ears in love when I awake in the morning!"

"So that is still to come?" she said, passing her hand

playfully over his hair, "Alas! poor youth, I fear you may have long to wait! To-morrow is Sunday, and when you get to your drawingboard, you are most likely to find a slender shaft, or a well-proportioned capital, more attractive than all the Lottchens ever born; and indeed my son, it is not a pity! You have plenty of time before you yet."

She sat silent for a while, and thoughtfully staring at the little blue flame of the tea-kettle, that had been singing a merry treble to her voice. He too was silent, sighed, and shoved away his empty plate.

"Little mother," he said at last; "I daresay you are right. At least, I suppose you should know more about these things than I do. Tell me honestly now, in strictest confidence, as a mother should speak to a grown-up son: how long is it since you loved your first love? — And why did nothing come of it, as in general, they say, nothing ever did, does, or can come of anybody's first love?"

A shade passed over her face. "Good boys don't ask questions;" she said, shortly. "You be one; and fetch down our history from the bookshelf, and let us read a chapter of it before we go to bed."

"Not to-night, little mother, please not!" he implored. "Indeed it would be no use; it would be more waste time than ever, to drum any more of those weary old stories into my hard head to-night. Tell me one rather, as you used to do when I was a boy. I used to sit there, on that very footstool at your feet. You could tell beautiful stories. About the emperor Octavian, and the sons of Haymon, come now;" and before she could prevent him, he had crouched down at her feet. "Here I am, and so now begin, little mother; I am

sure a true love-story would do me far more good than all those bloody battles, and cruel murders you seem to think so necessary to my education."

He threw back his head with its shock of curls, and looked up with a face it was not so easy to resist.

"You are a naughty curious boy," she said; and you turn upon me now, to punish me for having spoiled you. You think I can deny you nothing; but that is your mistake. Get up, sir, will you? — and go to bed, and sleep away the presumptuous thought, that your little mother, who after God, should be your first authority on earth, ever was, or ever could have been, any such green gosling as you may have seen to-night. Well, do you mean to go?" — He did not stir.

"What's the use of making a fuss?" he said playfully. "You know you always end by doing what I want, naturally; because I never want anything but what is reasonable. And now I want to hear this love-story of yours — and I *ought* to hear it, that I may not look like a fool when other people talk of it, and wonder why you never married — though —"

"Though?"

"Well, though you were so handsome, — they say."

"*Who* says —?"

"Peter Lars for one; besides, I have only to open my eyes and see."

"You don't say so?"

"That is, to be candid, I never opened them till yesterday, when Peter Lars was talking of it, and said he would give a great deal to have seen you as you were when you first came, ten years ago. And then it only just occurred to me that I had been struck

with you at the time. Since then, I never thought about it. I hardly knew whether you were plain or pretty. You were my own little mother, and that was all I cared for. But I see that Peter Lars, though I can't abide him, spoke truth when he said —"

"When he said, I had once been handsome? — thank you!"

Walter reddened. "Nay, you must not take it that way; for I think, on the contrary, yours is a face that could not alter much in half a lifetime."

"Possibly," she answered quietly: "By rights, a face that has never been young, should never grow old, unless the hair turns grey." A silence followed, while the little flame under the tea-kettle suddenly went out, and hushed that too. At last the girl resumed. "Yet I wrong myself; I was as young once as the youngest — happiest — most careless. If I changed so soon it was not my fault."

"Whose then?" he said, very softly, holding his breath to listen; and as his head rested on her knee, he felt how she shivered through all her limbs at the recollection.

"Whose fault was it?" he whispered, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling — on a spot where a tiny ring of light was flickering above the cylinder of the little lamp.

"It is not a long story," she said reluctantly; "but a story that is neither new nor pretty: and so why should I tell it you? If you had been a daughter, instead of being a son, I should not have let you grow up to be nineteen, without having told it. It might not have done much good, what stories ever did? But at least, I should have done my duty by her, as a mother. But you that are a man, what good could I

have done, by telling you that man is a rapacious and a selfish animal. If your own conscience has not taught you that, sooner or later it will."

"Rapacious? You know me better, little mother!"

"Right dear boy;" she said, much moved. "And if I had not expected you to be different from other men, should I have taken the trouble, all these eleven years to help you out of your childhood? No, dear, in that sense you will never be a man: could you have even believed it possible that a man could break his plighted troth to a helpless maiden, simply because she told him that she had nothing to bring him, but her face and her fair fame, and her sweet seventeen?"

Walter started from his seat, and took a few hasty turns about the room; then dropping down again on the stool at her feet. "Tell me all;" he said.

"What is there to tell?" she answered sadly. "What signifies name and date and place? I have taught myself to forget it, but it has made me old before my time — I could not forget that if I would, for my glass tells me that every morning."

"Your glass tells fibs then," said Walter, interrupting her. "I have watched you narrowly; when you are by yourself, or with a person you dislike, you can look so grave and stern as to frighten people. But with me, when you are cheerful, and especially when you laugh, I often think there is not a girl I know, so young or so handsome as my own mamma."

She tapped him lightly on the mouth. "This is not the dancing-lesson, where compliments are practised with the steps. But I know you mean it kindly, dear; you want to comfort me for the mortifications of the

past. But you need not, my son; I have comforted myself for this lost luck, and can even thank God that I did lose it. And was it not strange? A month or two after the thing had been broken off, and he had turned to a richer woman, Fortune was so mischievous as to send us a legacy which nobody had ever thought of; my elder sister and myself were now good matches, and my poor Rose who always had been plain, and long given up all hopes of a husband, was found to be a very charming creature, seen by the glitter of this unexpected gilding. Even an artist was among her suitors, and he considered himself a very fortunate man when she gave him the preference. I too did not want for choice, but it gave me no trouble, either of head or heart. Only when that man I had really loved came back to me, and had the impudence to talk of an error of the heart, then, indeed, the bitterness rose to my lips, and the disgust has remained. Especially when I hear people talking of man's virtues. They have taken good care, since then, to prevent my opinion changing; my poor sister —"

She stopped, and her eyebrows met with a sinister expression.

"Had she so hard a life of it?" asked Walter, timidly: "after I saw her she never left her bed, and then our Meister seemed kind enough; she always looked so sad, I used to pity her, though she never gave me a good word. After you came, you know, I was even forbidden to go near her: I often tried to think what made her so unkind. Of course I must have been a burthen to her at first, when the Meister brought me home, as a poor orphan boy, and she may

have found it hard to have to appear fond of me, because she had no children of her own. But I did all I could to make myself of use, and certainly I did the work of any two of our usual apprentices. Why did she always turn away her head when she saw me, as nervous people do, when they see a poor blind worm, or a mouse? — do you know why, little mother?”

“Forget it, dear,” she said. “Poor Rose was an unhappy woman; she took no pleasure in anything. *She* really never was young at any time; not even as a little girl — I never saw her really merry, while I used to be full of mirth and mischief. In our own home, where we lived before our dear mother died, it was quite different to this ridiculous little puffed-up place, which is neither town nor country, and where people are always standing upon their dignity, even though they were to perish with it in their own dullness. When I hear of your stupid dancing-lessons, and of the amusements you have here, that can as little enliven the dreary winter, as the couple of wretched little oil-lamps can the dull streets — then I really do feel as if I were — not nine-and-twenty — but nine-and-ninety; and as if I had lived so long — so long as to remember the days, when the children of men were innocent and dwelt in Paradise.”

“Did you ever care for dancing?”

“I danced all day, like the mermaids. Wherever I went and stood, I had the three-quarter time in my toes, and the prettiest of the quadrille tunes; and so I danced at my spinning-wheel, and while I was watching the kitchen-fire, or plaiting up my poor mother's hair, who could not easily lift her arms. Nay, even in church, I have caught myself singing the Psalms,

and beating valse time with my foot — and terribly ashamed I was, afterwards, when I thought what a sin it was. It was a disease I had; but I was soon cured. Ever after I found out that I had given away my heart to a heartless man, my feet seemed shod with lead. I never entered a ballroom again; and though in church my thoughts were often far away, they were not in a merrier place, but in a quieter — darker — farther above, or below the earth."

A silence followed, and they heard the watchman pass again, and the clock strike twelve.

"This is the hour for the ghosts to dance," said Walter with a laugh, and a sort of superstitious shudder. "What do you say to taking a turn, little mother? I don't know why, but I do feel a most inordinate desire to see you dance. The Meister is still at the Star. On a Saturday, you know, he never comes home till one o'clock. We have the house to ourselves, and may do what we please, without anybody's being the wiser — unless indeed, that rickety old cupboard should chance to fall upon us, and crush us, and send us dancing into all eternity. Hey! mamma, what do you say?"

He had jumped up, stroked back his hair, and stood before her, with a make-believe of buttoning his gloves, and settling his necktie."

"Foolish fellow!" she said. "What has come to him to-night? He sings, he falls in love, and now in the dead of night, he comes and calls upon his own old mother to stand up and dance with him! Is this what comes of spoiling sons, and letting them grow over their mother's heads?"

"Suffer me to say you are mistaken, honoured

madam," he began, with mock devotion. "It is, on the contrary, your duty, as guardian of my unguarded youth — your serious duty — to convince yourself that I really do grow in grace, and make progress in those ornamental branches of education, which are indeed most foreign to my nature. At the close of my course of dancing-lessons, it might be considered proper to hold some species of examination."

She raised her eyes to his, with a look so grave, as to tone down his mischievous mood at once.

"It is time to have done with nonsense," she said; and her voice sounded almost sharp. "I would say good-night, and leave you to yourself this moment, only I see that you are not nearly ready for sleep, nor will be, for ever so long — go, fetch the book. Even if you should not learn much to-night — which indeed does not seem likely — it may help us to get this nonsense out of your head, and that is always something gained."

He sighed as he walked towards the narrow bookshelf upon the cupboard. "Well, I suppose I must obey — for a change," he said, with a shake of his head. "Only if I should never know anything more of Barbarossa, than that his beard was red, it will be nobody's fault but yours."

"Well, and I suppose — for a change — I must temper my justice with mercy," she said, returning to a jesting tone. "Leave that history, and come and sit down here at my feet, and let me talk to you of gods and heroes; and if you are a good boy, and pay attention, I will shew you the pictures afterwards, as a reward."

She took up the little blue volume she had been looking through before. "I only found this yesterday,"

she said, "in the lumber-room upstairs; the title is 'Götterlehre,' and it was edited in the last century by a man called Moritz. There are some good verses of Goethe's in it; I know you will like them."

He resumed his place at her feet, and she began. She had a clear voice, and used it simply; only when her feelings became excited it would sink to a moving melodious contralto. After she had read the first few pages, and waxing warmer, began to recite the passage: "To which of these immortals, the highest prize?" &c., &c. — the words almost turned to song. She read the poem slowly to the end, and gently closing the book — "How do you like it?" she whispered.

He did not answer. The eyes that had been dreamily fixed on the blue ring of flickering light upon the ceiling, had been dropping gradually, till at last they closed. His head was resting on her knee; he breathed softly, and smiled in his sleep. "Is he thinking of his last valse?" she said to herself, looking thoughtfully down on his cloudless brow, and at the full red lips, above which a line of soft yellow down had begun to shew itself. The lines of that blooming face were certainly far from regular; but even in sleep, there was an intellectual charm about it — a spiritualized sense of humour — that ennobled its expression. Those lips had certainly never parted to laugh at or to utter a scurrile jest.

Thus she sat gazing on the placid face of the sleeper; till wearied by the thoughts that came sweeping through her brain in the stillness of the night, she leaned back in her chair, her eyelids drooped, and she too, fell into a slight dreamy kind of sleep.

An hour elapsed. The wind blew the casement open, with a gust of damp night-air that extinguished the little lamp that had almost consumed its oil.

A heavy dragging step was heard upon the stairs. She heard it even through her dream, though the darkness prevented her waking quite. The door opened, and a lantern threw its full ray of vivid light full upon her face. She started up in alarm: "Is that you, Meister?" she said, hastily passing her hand across her eyes.

A strange figure was standing on the threshold — a tall man between fifty and sixty, in a long loose coat trimmed with fur, buttoned over a faded red velvet waistcoat. He wore a cap or barret, placed so far forward upon his grizzling curls, as also to cover the half of his flushed forehead. One foot was shod with a coarse stout boot, and the other, wrapt out of all shape, with a large felt slipper.

For all his uneven gait, and his uncouth appearance, there was that about him which was well calculated to quell any inclination to laugh; and the look from those sinister dark eyes, directed towards the group formed by the two young people, was enough to make even this fearless girl quail.

"What does all this mean?" he said, as he came forward and placed his lantern upon the table. "What are you two doing here at this hour? Is the boy asleep, or have you been acting a play?"

"I do not profess to understand you;" she answered, flushing up with pride and scorn. "He is asleep, as you see. We were reading, and he fell asleep; and then I did too."

"And the lamp? Why was the window suddenly

darkened when I came up to the house-door? Did you mean to make me believe that you were in bed, and had been asleep for hours?"

She bent over the lad, and took him by the shoulder: "Get up, Walter," she said; "the Meister is here, and I wish to go to my own room, and not to hear any more of what he may please to say in his drunken —"

"Who dares to say it is the wine I have drunk that makes me speak?" he broke out in a tone so fierce, that the sleeper started, and springing to his feet, stood upright before him with a penitent mien.

"Go to bed, Walter," he continued, with more moderation. "It is nearly two o'clock. This is not to be borne! At this hour of the night —" His eye caught the girl's, who had now recovered her usual self-possession. "Ah, well!" he growled, "it will be put a stop to soon, in one way or another." Then — "I have somewhat to say to you, sister-in-law. I shall not be able to get up to-morrow morning; I feel my pains in all my joints, and my leg as heavy as a stone. So I shall expect to see you in my room, Helen; Good-night." He lighted a candle, took up his lantern, and limped downstairs again to his own room.

The two he left behind him did not speak another word. The lad gave Helen's hand a squeeze, and nodding to her with a look half penitent, half drowsy, he went up to the garret-room he shared with the first apprentice, Peter Lars, who had been asleep for hours. He threw off his clothes, listening to the cats that were running riot upon the roof; and only then remembered that he had left Lottchen's crimson bow to perish with

the others, instead of taking it up with him to sleep upon. He laughed to himself before he fell asleep. "She is right," he thought; "I don't suppose it *is* the real thing."

Next day was Sunday, and Helen went downstairs betimes, to knock at the Meister's door. He was lying upon the bed half dressed, in a faded green dressing-gown, with a blanket thrown over his ailing leg; while on the knee of the sound one, rested a heavy old book of plates, with views of churches and Roman ruins. The room was on the ground-floor, at the back of the house, and was filled with a greater disorder of artistic fancy than even the parlour upstairs.

When Helen came in, he rested his head of weird grizzling locks upon his fist, and partially raised himself. He only gave a slight nod by way of salutation; he seemed to be bent on letting her speak first.

In the middle of the room she stopped. "You wanted to speak to me, brother-in-law?" she said very composedly.

"Take a seat, will you, Helen;" and he pointed to a carved tripod stool that was covered with drawings and rolls of paper.

"Thank you, no. I hope you will not want me long; I am busy, for Christel is at church, and there is no one in the kitchen. What was it you wished to say to me?"

He hesitated a moment, and threw a hasty glance to try and find out the mood she might be in. Her serious face remained impassive.

"Doctor Hansen, the notary, was at the 'Star' last night," began the Meister, while he turned over the leaves of his book with a show of indifference. "He has never been seen in a wine-house, you know, since that sick sister of his died. And this time he had a particular reason for coming; and while he was walking home with me, he told me that reason. In short, he wants to marry you, Helen!"

She did not move a muscle.

"What made him speak to you about it?" she said, very coldly.

"He wanted to know if I thought you hated him."

"What could he have done to make me hate him?"

"What indeed? He is an honorable man — there is not a contrary opinion in the town; only he believes himself to be the object of your particular aversion. Every time he tried to speak to you, he says, you frowned and turned away."

"If I did, it was because I soon saw what he wanted of me. Where's the use of being civil to a man, if he has to be rejected in the end?"

"And why rejected?"

She paused before she spoke: "Be candid, brother; did he not ask you what my fortune was?"

"He asked me nothing of the kind."

"He had heard then, without asking, as much as was necessary for him to know. He is considered a clever man of business, I believe?"

"What of that? can't a man of business have human feelings as well as another? At all events he is in love now, Helen."

"In love, is he? you don't say so," and her lips quivered strangely as she spoke; "how can he find

time for that piece of folly, with all his business? However, I suppose I should feel grateful to him, so you had better save him farther trouble, and tell him that I cannot have the honor — that I regret, — and so forth; and to comfort him, you can tell him what a cross-grained treacherous race I come of, and what a miserable mistake you made in marrying my sister. Only think how that poor man would be to be pitied, if I were to play him such a terrible trick, as poor Rose played you, and light the stove with all I am worth, and only leave enough to bury me! Tell him that story, brother, and I dare say he will be completely comforted."

She had turned white as she was speaking, and kept her eyes fixed upon him, with a look of cool defiance he was not able to withstand; only when she was about to leave the room, and put an end to farther discussion, he recovered himself again. "I have not done yet;" he said gloomily.

"Not yet? — but my patience will not last much longer."

"*Nor* mine. I tell you plainly, I will not stand this nonsense with the boy. In putting a stop to it I am only doing my duty by him."

"How long have you been so conscious of your duty to him?"

Let by-gones be by-gones!" he said violently; "you will not stop my mouth with them, as you suppose. I tell you I can't bear to see your goings on with him; petting and patting that great grown fellow! I say, it is bad for him, do you hear me? — and if you don't give over, I shall find means to make you; you may take my word for it."

She opened her great grave eyes, and held her peace. Her self-possession appeared to embarrass him, and he went on in a quieter tone.

"I know what he owes you well enough; and what I have to thank you for; there can be no question of that. If things had gone on as they did when the boy first came, it would have been the ruin of him, body and soul. It is bad for children to feel themselves hated, and I was not in a position to save him from the feeling. You were a mother to him then, and his affection for you is no more than natural — within proper bounds. Wherever these are not, the devil steps in, and sows his tares. I need not explain my meaning; enough — he is now nineteen, and you are no more than nine-and-twenty. Don't let me see this sort of thing again. He is *not* to fall asleep over his reading as he did yesterday, and the lamp *need* not go out."

He averted his face, let his head fall back upon his pillow, and drew up his suffering leg. Whether he really was in pain, or only wished to break off the conversation, was not quite evident.

After a moment of breathless silence on both sides: "It is well," she said, with smothered utterance; "there are not many things in the world that could surprise me now; from *you*, nothing! — but that your way of thinking could be so base as this, even I could scarce be prepared for."

"Oho!" he said, very coolly. "Be so good as to spare these grand expressions for an occasion where they may seem more fitting. What I now say, and what I intend to do, I am ready to account for before any jurisdiction whatever, and call on my own seeing eyes

to witness. Lovers are blind, we all know that; only they need not suppose other people to be blind as well."

"Lovers!" she echoed, with an irrepressible gust of passion.

"Lovers; I say, lovers;" he repeated, with emphasis: "He, at least, is on the high-road to that condition, whether he be aware of it or not; and you must have lived these nine-and-twenty years in a maze, if you really do not see that you are over head and ears in love with the boy. You don't mean to come to me, I hope, with that trash and nonsense about adoption and maternal feelings. The thing is as I state it, whatever you may please to say. But if you do search your heart, and ask yourself what is to be the end of it — whether you mean to go on rejecting respectable men who would make good husbands, for the sake of your nonsensical love-scenes with a half grown hobble-dehoy — —"

"Enough," she interrupted him, with glowing cheeks: "Now I assuredly do know enough of yourself and your opinions. They cannot affect me much, for I never had any ambition with regard to them. There are *many* things in which we differ, only before I turn my back upon you, I should be glad to hear what you have resolved upon in this matter."

"As I have repeatedly told you; I am resolved to make an end of this, and part you two, the sooner, the better."

"And how?"

"As it turns out. If you take the wisest course, and marry Dr. Hansen, it would be the best plan for all of us, and a better proof of your sincerity with your motherhood, than all this ranting, and shrugging of

shoulders. If you cannot make up your mind to this, the boy will have to go."

"As a Wanderbursch? As a common house-painter?"

"As a house-painter, of course; what else can he be? you know I am not in a position to send him to an architectural school, or to afford his keep for six or seven years, instead of having him here, to help me to an honest livelihood, now that I am half a cripple."

"Well, you have spoken frankly to me," she answered after a pause; "and I suppose for that much, I ought to thank you. What must be, will be, one way or the other; meantime you are at liberty to think what you please—and I know what I have to think."

She turned to the door, but as she laid her hand on the lock, he called after her: "I asked Hansen to dine with us to-day. I don't intend to say a word more upon the subject. You must give him your answer yourself."

She said nothing, she only gave an absent nod, and went — but not into the kitchen. Her heart beat violently as she flew upstairs, to take refuge in her own room. It was off the sitting-room, with two narrow windows, that looked out on the sunny street. As soon as she felt herself alone, she sat down upon her bed, for her knees were knocking under her, and she could scarcely stand. She sat staring at the motes dancing in the sunbeam, that fell aslant upon the floor. As rapid and impalpable as those whirling atoms, was the vortex in her brain. At last, her eyes ran over; and, in a gush of passionate tears, she poured forth the pain and grief she had repressed so sternly and so scornfully, through all that hostile conference below.

About this time, Walter came in from a French lesson which, on Helen's advice, he was in the habit of taking after early church. He went straight to a large low room upon the ground-floor. The dining-table stood in the centre of it, and a few old presses and cupboards, ranged round the walls, contained the Meister's whole stock of decorative designs, and all his plans and patterns. — Here, it was evident, a feminine hand kept order. The boards of the dinner-table were polished white with scrubbing. The sand lay still immaculate upon the floor, and the large pots of ivy by the windows, shaded the purest, brightest panes.

The room looked to the court and garden, and was entirely sunless; so that Walter, who had taken out his drawing-board, and seated himself in the best light, undisturbed by a single ray, very soon became absorbed in his work.

There was an old villa outside the town, that had formerly belonged to a family of rank, and had now been purchased by the rich Burgermeister. There, among other rooms that wanted painting, was a large saloon in the Rococo style, that had to be restored from the very foundation. And for many weeks past, the Meister had refused all other orders, that he might finish this master-piece within the appointed time. — Here, as every where, Walter had to help him vigorously. But while with bold pencil, he was grouping arabesques and wreaths of fruit and flowers, adapted from old engravings, to renovate the obliterated ceiling in its original style, he found it far more interesting to study the whole plan of the building, and then,

taking note of its measures and proportions, to work it out at leisure, after his own head, with its sections, height and basements. He had only a sweet stolen hour or two, on holidays, to spend on these. The Meister snarled and scolded him, when he came in and caught him at such allotria — "Where's the good of them?" he growled. "There are many things more needful to our business —"

To-day, however, the old man was safe in his own room, tied by the leg, and could not possibly disturb him; so he worked on quietly and quickly, and hoped to have done by dinner-time.

All at once the door opened, and in slipped a small dark figure, with his hands in his trowser's pockets, and his close shorn raven head slightly inclined towards his left shoulder, which was visibly some inches higher than his right one. He kept the lower part of his face on the stretch of an everlasting grin — and while the thin lips always seemed prepared for a whistle or a jovial smack, the restless grey eyes had wicked gleams of malice, and cunning, and consuming desire.

"Good morning, young genius;" he said, coming round the table with noiseless step; "busy as a bee? — When you come to my time of life," (he was barely five-and-twenty), "you will have spent a good part of that speed, and will be glad enough to take your Sundays easily as I do, in having a good long sleep, and then in pleasantly getting rid of your wretched wages, that are certainly not worth the keeping. Even now, if you were not such a stiffnecked sort of virtue, I should say to you: 'Put that scrawl in the fire, and come with

me. I could show you where you may taste a sound French wine, that is well worth its price."

"Much obliged to you," said Walter coldly, "your taste is not mine, Peter Lars; and I can't stand wine in the morning —"

"I know you can't," sneered Peter. "You are such a pattern of propriety! — And for as tall and as broad as you are, you let yourself be led about by a piece of womankind, like a cockchafer tied to a thread. What we men think of that, you never care to know."

"Men!" echoed Walter, and with all the young fellow's kindheartedness, he could not repress the look of irony that stole over his features.

"I say, men;" repeated the little dark one, and stretched himself in all his limbs. "One need not be six foot high, to feel oneself a man by the side of women's darlings, and giant babies in swaddling clothes."

"Thank Heaven, then, Peter Lars, for having made a man of thee, and go thy ways rejoicing — What's the use of coming here to worry me? can't you leave me to myself in peace? Do I look after you?" Peter came close up to him, and peered in his face with a wicked smile.

"I do not mean to disturb you long," he said; "but I could not deny myself the pleasure of congratulating so dutiful a son, on the acquisition of a bran new step-papa. Ha! now I see our bright young genius can vouchsafe to look at me;" and, in fact, Walter was staring at him in speechless surprise.

"What are you talking of?" — he said impatiently.

"Of nothing, and of nobody less, than Mamsell Helene! who does not mean to content herself, with

petting her great big boy for ever; and begins to feel a hankering after real legitimate babies of her own, and of more natural dimensions."

"Don't be stupid!" — and Walter laughed, half in anger, and half amused at the idea. It had never occurred to him before. "*She* never means to marry! That is a fact I happen to know."

"None of your arrogant contradictions, I beg," retorted Peter; "one may be a very bright young genius, and yet see nothing of what is passing in broad daylight—I have it upon the best authority. *I* know she is going to be married, and moreover I can tell you, to whom."

"Tell me then."

"What can that signify to you? — To you, one step-father must be just as inconvenient as another. Those happy days are over, when you made rain and sunshine, and used to be her darling, and the core of her heart, and the apple of her eye. At least the new Papa would be a terrible ninny, if he were not prepared to decline with thanks a wedding present as large as life — of such a stepson. And, indeed, it should be all one to me, as well. Having always had the honor of enjoying the haughty damsel's undivided aversion, it can make no difference to me, whether her choice be M. or N.; it does not in any way alter my position, as a vermin, — toad, bug, spider, worm — what you please — to be trodden upon and crushed, were it not for the risk of soiling a dainty shoe ——"

"Nonsense — you exaggerate, as you always do — but tell me —"

"Whether I exaggerate or not, nobody can tell except myself;" and he distorted his ignoble mouth to a grimace of atrocious spite. "Why should I make any secret of it? — On this very spot, not ten days ago, I came and made her a formal offer of my hand and heart. Upon which she just walked out and left me standing, as if I had been an idiot, not worth answering! — Bah! — I can laugh at it now! — I can't think what possessed me! I am not such a beggar as to care for her thalers. If it were not for my own amusement, I could throw over the whole concern — give up this daubing and scrawling business, and go home to my own place, where my father and mother are well to do, living comfortably on their own broad acres. — Only I was such an ass as to be smitten with this scornful damsel, and I would have been willing to forget that she is no chicken; (several years older than myself in fact.) And she — I tell you she looked at me as if a toad had spit its venom on her. Death and damnation! wouldn't I have given her a piece of my mind! Only I thought: '*She* will never marry — she will have nobody — she must have found a thing or two in her past life, to disgust her with man and marriage;' and so I choked upon my wrath. But this is quite another affair. If she hangs out other colors, and capitulates to another suitor, I see she did not think me good enough —"

He swallowed down the rest of his abuse, and only waved about his hands, in confused convulsive gesticulation.

"Are you sure of what you are saying?" asked Walter in a low voice, that was trembling with some strong suppressed emotion. "Who is the man? — is

it a settled thing? — And yet no — it is impossible — only last night —”

“What do you venture to call impossible, when you are speaking of a woman? — Bah! teach *me* their tricks and dodges! — *I* saw how late it was last night, when you left her! — I dare say she would not let you go, but coddled you to her heart's content, it being the last time. But I tell you it is as true — as true as that the sun is shining. — She is going to be married — and her choice is no other than wretched quill-driver of a lawyer —”

“Hansen? — the Doctor?” —

“If he be not the man, and my story be not true, I give you leave to call me rogue. Just now I was in the little lumber room off the Meister's, where he keeps his samples of colors, and I was looking out some that we shall want to-morrow — for he blew me up about them yesterday — when I heard Mamsell Helene come into his room, and they had a long confabulation. I could not hear it all, but the upshot of it was, that she means to take him. Of course she made a fuss about it — but when he said: ‘He is to dine with us to-day, and you can give him your answer,’ she was mum as a mouse. If she did not mean it to be favorable, I much mistake her if she would not have declined the pleasure of eating her dinner with him first. She is not so fond of speaking up, and saying no to a fellow, as I know by my own experience.”

“Surely you must have heard wrong, Peter;” and the young fellow fell into a fit of musing; “it can't be possible.”

“Can't be possible! — but what's the use of talking

of men's business to a baby. I only repeated the thing that I might not choke upon it. For a girl like that, to go and marry a rusty fusty lawyer — a scribbler of deeds and parchments! He has not a conception of what she is worth, except in thalers! Ha! — would not she be a delicate morsel for an artist, who looks farther than a trifle of white and red and those mincing ways that attract the crowd. What does a lawyer know about the lines of her face? — and that she has a figure fit to drive a fellow crazy? She does not show it off, to be sure — she wraps to the chin, as if she were a mummy; — more's the pity! — a stone might weep to see her! But for a man who has eyes in his head, one little finger is enough to construe the whole figure by, and you might search the world over, before you could find —”

“Silence!” interrupted Walter passionately — “I will not hear another word.” He had sprung to his feet, with a flaming face. “Get out! I say, and never let me hear that you have spoken your foul thoughts to any other living soul — or else —”

And he struck his clenched fist upon the table, with a violence that made the very walls shake.

“Milksof! baby face!” and Peter gnashed his teeth, while he retreated from his immediate neighbourhood; “It shall go to its mother — it shall — and have its pap — and sit on its own mammy's lap, and have a smart new dress for her wedding-day. Ha! such a fellow as that is not worthy of a man's confidence. I did feel sorry to see you in a cunning woman's leading strings; and I pitied you — but now go to! — I despise you as much as I pitied you before. We two have had our last words together.”

And with his most vicious look, Peter sauntered away, whistling.

Walter remained standing on the selfsame spot for half an hour, at least, without moving. His brain was reeling — he fetched his breath heavily, and shut his eyes, as though he felt ashamed to see himself by the light of day, while such thoughts were seething in his imagination. At last he heard Helen's step upon the stairs; he felt as if he had been scalded, and impelled by some inexplicable instinct, he seized his cap, and fled; through the garden, out into the open country.

She heard him go, but she had no suspicion that it was from her he fled; she went to the window and looked after him as long as she could catch a glimpse of his long light hair among the leafless shrubberies.

She thought she had wept away all that had been so heavy on her heart. People who are sparing of their tears expect wonders from them, and the good they are supposed to do, when they do flow. But she found they had done very little to solace her.

What made her weep so bitterly? She had long schooled herself to meet aggression with the tranquil energy of a mind, that no contradiction of fate can disappoint or surprise, for the reason that it is entirely without hopes or wishes.

She believed that she had nothing to expect from life — nothing to gain. Now, she had been suddenly reminded how much she had to lose.

First of all: — to a proud spirit the bitterest loss — confidence in her own heart. Those unsparing words, concerning her relations with a child, whom she had seen grow up to manhood, had sounded strange and

incomprehensible when she had first heard them — she believed that she could shake them from her, as an insult. Other cares that had arisen during that interview with her brother-in-law, had then appeared more urgent. But as soon as she had found herself alone in her silent room, all other cares had dissolved like shadows, and the words she had so scornfully disowned — these words alone remained.

She thought over the ten years that had passed, since she had first entered that dreary house; when the intimidated boy, dumb between his adopted parents, who quarrelled over him daily, with ever-increasing discord, had come to her at once, and poured forth all the sorrows of his little heart to her, and had clung to her with overflowing love and confidence. Without many words, he had understood that she was to be his protectress.

It was a task she did not find easy always, especially as opposed to her own sister. But the compensation was a thousandfold, in her tenderness for the child, in whom his early hardships appeared to have blighted all the gaiety and elasticity of his age; and now under her genial influence, she saw these expand, brighter and more spontaneous, from year to year.

And she knew that he owed her more than this mere deliverance from bodily duress. She had been as indefatigable in the tending of his mind; in helping him to complete in private, the defective education of the common school which he attended daily. In this, she had no small opposition to suffer from her pupil and his artistic tastes; not to speak of her own inclination to do his bidding, instead of enforcing hers. Far pleasanter she would have found it, to sit working

by his side, listening to his good-humoured rattle, while he was busy over some architectural drawing; than to tie him down to the thread of a weary lesson-book, that was to drag him through some dry essentials of education. But in all things she had taught herself to consider, first of all, his real wants and future welfare. She had never trifled with her maternal duties, nor been childish with her child.

Was it strange that, in time, the course of all her plans and wishes fell into this single channel? that, waking or sleeping, he was ever before her eyes? that these followed him, unconsciously, in all his movements when he was present; and, when absent, that she looked as constantly towards the door, and listened to nothing so interesting as his returning step?

And now when she mentally compared him with all the other men she had known in all these years, was she not justified in believing that she could do without any and all of these, if only he remained to her? And there was no weak idolatry in this; she had never deceived herself. She saw that he was neither handsome, nor graceful, not even of very engaging manners; she often teased him about his awkward ways and helpless movements, and his duncolored shock of hair; she acknowledged that his features were commonplace; that his figure was a clothes-stick, for all the tailor's pains to make a man of him. Yet there was a charm about him, that even strangers and coarser natures, she observed, seldom could resist; a breath of freshest, purest youthfulness; — an innate tact of the heart; a dash of that genuine genial humour, that lends wings to the soul, and raises it high above the vulgar worship of any of the golden calves and idols of the day.

It was strange; — but with this young pupil of hers, in worldly matters a child, she could discourse of the last aim and end of all mortal life, as though they had been centenarians in experience, and in years.

Thus it had been, and this had been their happiness; and was it to be no more? had it suddenly become so dangerous? Was it now to be avoided as a snare? She had been told to her face, that it was for the sake of this lad, that she rejected all her suitors. Well, she would not attempt to deny it. She would have deceived any man to whom she would have sworn to be only his. This feeling had grown to be a passion; but a passion that was hallowed by years of purest tenderness, of most unselfish sacrifice. She looked upon him as her own; and had she not a right to him? — what would he have been, without her?

And was she really to give him up? — The thought was more than she could bear. *He* did not wish to leave her — *he* knew how necessary she was to him. Could there really be danger in remaining as they were? — To him, certainly none; his whole life lay before him yet, wide and distant. *He* could not lose by perfecting his growth in shade and solitude. To suppose that her own presence could prove dangerous to him, seemed nothing less than madness. She felt herself older by ten additional years to those she already was.

Could he ever possess her heart more entirely than he already did? was that possible? — And if it were, what harm could it do her? — She had nothing else in life to make it valuable to her, but this one feeling.

And yet she had been weeping, — long and bitterly. She felt as if some mute veiled fate were ever by her side. With all her self-command, and bracing resolutions, wherewith to strengthen herself in her own rights, and in the consciousness that others could have no legitimate power over her — except she gave it them — she could not overcome a feeling of anxiety, and an instinct that their happiest days were over, and trials and difficulties impending.

The Meister's threat of sending the lad away on his Wanderschaft, had not seriously alarmed her. She knew that he would scarcely make up his mind to part with him. Certainly not to drive him to a course so contrary to his inclinations. To dispose of him in any other way, in the Meister's position, would have been simply impossible. Yes, there had been hard times of want, when Helen had gladly come to his assistance; and thus he had become dependent on her, in a manner that, though she never took advantage of it, made him feel a sort of tacit obligation to desist from any very violent opposition to her wishes.

In fact no woman had less reason to fear the despotic interference of any man in her fate. Yet words had been spoken, that never could be made unspoken; and they had brushed the bloom off what had been dearest to her on earth.

She only became clearly aware of this, as she looked after his retreating figure in the garden, and felt almost glad that she had not met him; for the first time she might not have been able to look straight into his eyes. She had no idea that, within the last hour, he too had been startled out of the peace

of his unsuspecting mind. She believed that the suffering was hers alone; and in the midst of her anxieties, she found no small comfort in the belief, that like a true mother, she had contrived to conjure over her own devoted head, the hostile elements that were threatening his. This helped her to recover her composure, for in the more absorbing troubles, she had almost forgotten the disagreeable task before her, of having definitively to reject and mortify a man, for whom she had never felt anything worse than indifference.

When the clock struck the dinner-hour, she entered the large dining-room with perfect self-possession; and received the notary, who bowed low before her, as she would have received any other guest of her brother-in-law. The Meister had left his bed, and joined them in his dressing-gown, in anything but a holiday trim, or holiday humour. He now lay stretched on a sofa, at a little distance from the table. An old neighbour, a standing guest on Sundays, stood modestly waiting with the two apprentice boys at the windows.

Walter came in such visible perturbation that he could scarcely stammer out the commonest forms of salutation. Nobody however seemed to notice this, except his little mother; who, perplexed by the sudden change in his demeanour, threw him a look of dismay, which he felt too conscious-stricken to receive with calmness.

The Meister enquired for Peter Lars, and scolded at his delay, until they all sat down to table without waiting for him.

It was some time before any kind of general conversation could be established. Walter kept his eyes

upon his plate, and held his tongue, without attending to anything that was passing round him. The old neighbour, who, in general, was rather fond of playing the connoisseur, and holding forth in rambling dissertations on drawing and effects of color, was silent this time, as he saw the Meister neither spoke nor ate, but ground his teeth for self-command in bodily torture. The boys were tongue-tied, naturally, in their master's presence; and thus on Helen, and on the Notary, who sat opposite, the whole cost of the conversation fell.

There was nothing remarkable about his outward man. Only a fine forehead, and a pair of clear calm eyes, were the attractions of his face. And there was an expression of animated benevolence in his countenance when he spoke, that, together with the masculine cast of his features, was especially captivating to the confidence of his hearers.

After the first awkwardness of his meeting with Helen, he became gayer and more conversible than he was ever known to be. He spoke of his travels in Sweden and Norway; of the Scandinavian races; of their customs and holidays; of their national songs. He talked pleasantly, for he never generalized, either in praise or blame — each thing was distinctly drawn, given in its own peculiar coloring, with its distinctive touches. Even old Christel, who waited at table, left the door ajar to listen to him longer; and the Sunday guest applauded with approving nods, shoving in here and there a choice remark or two upon Scandinavian Art, which the traveller was so kind as to leave undisputed.

And yet his pains were wasted. Helen's attention

was an effort. Her mind was engaged in speculations upon the possible cause of the cloud that had come over her darling's spirits.

She hazarded a jest or two, to win him over to the general conversation. But a beseeching, almost frightened look, from the young dreamer, had each time induced her to desist.

The bottle of wine produced by Christel, had been emptied to the better health of their host; it had been the lawyer's toast — who had returned thanks silently by a slight nod. He had not drunk a drop, and hardly waited for dinner to be over, to drag himself back to his own room, in order to groan without restraint, and, unheard, curse his sufferings.

While the table was being cleared away, the others had gone upstairs to take their coffee in the sitting-room. There, between the pictures and plaster-casts with which the walls were covered, stood an old piano-forte. It had not been opened for years; but now at Helen's request, Dr. Hansen had seated himself before it, and played a few national melodies from the North.

He then sang some of the songs, with a voice that, if somewhat uncultivated, was very musical.

Helen had taken her work to the window, where Walter stood gazing out into the street, without taking any notice of what was passing.

Under cover of the music she whispered a few questions. What ailed him? — Had the Meister been scolding him? had he been quarrelling with Peter Lars? — Peter's absence she thought suspicious.

Walter only shook his head; and at last, seized with an unaccountable fit of restlessness, he jumped up, and was about to escape for a solitary walk, when

just then the door opened, and visitors entered. They were relations of the Meister's, Lottchen Klas and her mother — Lottchen Klas, who, but yesterday, had stood so high in her partner's estimation. To-day he only felt annoyed, when the little maid came smiling in under her mother's wing, with a shy look of satisfaction, that made him conscious that his defection would be a great offence to her especially. However he hardly spoke a civil word, to either mother or daughter; and when Helen began some playful remark about their party of the night before, he fetched a book from the cupboard, and in the face of all good breeding, he settled himself to read, as though he had been in the remotest solitude.

Not long after, somebody proposed a walk, and, with the exception of the old neighbour, who took his leave, the whole company was set in motion. The mother walking in front, with Helen and Dr. Hansen; Walter following with his pretty little partner. But he was as taciturn as before — all along the peopled streets, and out by the town-gate to a garden where the higher among the burghers were wont to enjoy their Sunday afternoons, — he never spoke one word; he even neglected to bow to passing acquaintances; — he had no eye for the dismayed little face by his side, that grew cloudier and cloudier, until a shower of tears appeared most imminently impending. Fortunately, before this crisis, one of her yesterday's partners came up to the rescue, and did duty both for himself and Walter.

Now, if he had been so minded, he might have stolen away and relieved his oppressed soul from the shackles of society. But in the morning he had had occasion to find out, that the tangle of his ideas grew

worse in solitude. And besides, he felt irresistibly rivetted to Helen's presence, with chains he could not break. He kept an anxious watch over every gesture, every look, every word, that might possibly throw some light on his chances of really losing her.

He too had lived on heedlessly by her side, without ever asking himself, how long this state of things was to last. — What they called the feeling that united them — so long as they *had* it, what cared he? From the time he could remember anything, or anybody, after the mother that bore him, Helen had been the person most essential to his existence.

And the last few years, that had brought him to the age of manhood and independence, had only served to strengthen the closeness and confidence of their relations. In the same proportion as he had grown beyond her guidance in commoner things, he came more eagerly to seek it in every thing that perplexed his head or heart. What she had been to him; — sister, mother, friend, play-fellow — grave or gay, the companion of every hour — he had no name for it. Indeed, he had never thought of naming it: with regard to her, the terms handsome — charming — least of all dangerous — had no sense for him; she was herself, and that was all he cared for.

And now he was suddenly to reconcile himself to the perception, that she was a woman like other women, creating passions; — attracting men, awakening jealous rivalry. The idea seemed so preposterous, that he felt as if his own life had become strange to him. Only last night, when she had told him of her first love, he had listened, as he had done when they used to tell each other fairy tales, and expound each other's dreams — and now

these most inconceivable realities had to be accepted as facts — one man had been a suitor for her hand; another had been silently rejected by her. — Would these last pretensions find no favor in her eyes? — and if they did? — How insupportable he found the torture, when he tried to think of her as the wife of any man living. In his unsullied soul, there arose an indefinable sensation of wrong and shame, that ran through his veins like liquid fire. He would have given his life to shield her from a look; and when he recalled the coarseness of his comrade's words, he involuntarily clenched his fist. And yet, while he was walking behind her now, he could not take his eyes from her. For the first time, he observed the grace of every movement; he silently compared the classical lines of her neck and shoulders, to the massive shapelessness of the elder lady, and the insignificant prettiness of her little daughter. His eyes were opened, and they saw her graceful walk, and the way she placed her slender feet; and — when she turned to speak to her companion — the regularity of her clearly cut profile, seen in the relief of her dark bonnet; and then the glitter of her white teeth, when her lips parted, as they often did, without a smile, but with a pensive and rather lofty look, that was in keeping with the deep low tones of her voice.

Indeed she never smiled, unless when she was talking to him; this discovery rewarded him for his eager watchfulness, when she was talking to other men. She *did* love him best; there could be no doubt of that. Why then tolerate the attentions of a stranger, if he was to be nothing more?

Thus he questioned himself, in his perplexity; when

the perception suddenly flashed upon him, that after all, if she *did* feel youthfully enough to begin life afresh, he certainly had no business to prevent her — What compensation had he to offer her? Was it not the idea of a maniac, to suppose that she was to go on for ever, sacrificing her life to his; waiting upon him so long as he should think fit to go on calling her his little mother, and keep dangling by her apron-string?

When they came to the coffee-garden, they found there was a band in the saloon of the house, playing vales, and summoning the younger among the loungers to go in and dance them; an impromptu ball was soon arranged. The elders sat in the sunshine before the windows, occasionally turning their heads from their coffee-cups, to look round at the dancing vortex within, and see how their young people were amusing themselves.

Lottchen had asked and obtained her mother's permission to join the dancers, and now stood evidently waiting for Walter's assistance, to take advantage of it. But he rose, and pleading a bad headache, he walked away to escape from the noise and crowd; so with a sigh of undisguised regret, she saw herself forced to accept the offered arm of his more willing substitute. —

Helen saw what was going on but too plainly, and she had begun to divine that she herself might be the cause of Walter's change of spirits. How could he have heard of his adopted father's intentions? and if he *had* heard of them, why should they so affect him? — The notion that jealousy could have any share in his vexation, never suggested itself to her mind for a moment. She wanted to talk it over frankly with him; only he had taken himself and his gloom for a solitary saunter, along the highroad, past the last detached

houses, towards the open country, perfectly insensible to the charms of a lovely afternoon in early spring. He came to a halt before an ancient country-house long since deserted, and stood looking through the railings at the neglected garden — The dried-up basin of the fountain, that had long ceased to flow, was now filled up with decaying leaves and exuberant nettles.

A kneeling nymph in the scanty drapery of the French school, with her urn gently inclined, seemed bending over it, in melancholy contemplation of the weeds. It was a pretty little figure, and would have deserved a better fate. Now the sparrows made a perch of her polished shoulders, and the wreath upon her head was crumbling into dust. What kept Walter standing there so long, on the spot from which he could best see the contours of that figure as they stood out against the darkness of the grotto?

A measure or two of the merry music swept past him, borne on the evening wind; he looked as if he were waiting for the lonely beauty to rise to her feet, and come towards him. He could not tire of gazing on those slender lines of beauty, which many a time before, he had passed without even seeing, for all his artist eye — and now they seemed to haunt him; he began to feel uneasy; he tore himself away, and heaving a deep sigh, he thoughtfully retraced his steps.

He arrived just in time to see his party break up, but he did not join it. He followed at a distance, keeping his eye upon it.

This time, mother and daughter walked in front, with Lottchen's partner; while Helen and Dr. Hansen followed. He saw that she spoke kindly to him, and fancied he could see that the lawyer no longer doubted

the fulfilment of his wishes. Now he even saw her laugh, at something her suitor said.

Their way home took them past the house where Dr. Hansen lived; they stopped before it, and he pointed upwards, and said something, to which she returned no answer; but her eyes followed the direction of his hand, and then they both walked on, as it appeared, in a graver mood.

Their distant watcher concluded that all was settled, and a feeling of unutterable wretchedness overcame him. He stopped, and tried to think where he was, and whither he was going? — He did not know, and he did not care — Anywhere! — Only not to that home where he should inevitably have to face her.

One of his former play-fellows came past, and found him standing; they exchanged a few words, which ended in Walter's accepting an invitation to take a glass of wine with him, and, arm in arm, the two young men walked away, and turned down another street.

Meanwhile, conversing on indifferent subjects, the others had reached the Meister's door; and here the women separated; but the lawyer remained standing upon the threshold, as if he found it quite impossible to part from Helen in this uncertainty.

She had looked round, more than once, for Walter, whose absence disquieted her; she was not so entirely absorbed, however, in this anxiety, as to forget the feelings of her present companion. She, too, desired that they might come to an explication.

"This morning, my brother-in-law told me what

you had confided to him;" she began, in a calm tone, but not with any coldness; "I have to thank you for all the kindness and regard, which I acknowledge to be the motives of the wishes you expressed to him. I have always entertained a high consideration for you, and taken pleasure in your society. But my life does not admit of any farther change. I do not wish to form any other ties. I shall be quite contented if I may continue the old ones; and have none of them prematurely broken. I owe you this frank explanation, and I hope it will not lower me in your esteem."

He turned white, and some time passed before he spoke; "You will not send me away without one ray of hope; may I never be any more to you? — Ah! do not say that this is your only answer!"

"Indeed it must be. I should be very sorry to deceive myself, or you."

"And is there nothing else to part us, save your own disinclination to change your present life?"

"My present life is enough for me;" — and she reddened slightly. "And I find its duties sufficiently absorbing. Besides — but let us say no more; my reasons are my own, and you may be convinced that I should oppose no trifling ones. Give up this idea, I beg — indeed, it would not be for your happiness."

She did not finish, for she saw that he did not listen; he bowed low, and turned away, and left her without another look.

His whole manner had surprised and touched her; for worlds she would not have given this earnest man the reasons that she had used against her brother-in-law. She stood at the door awhile, and looked down the street, to see if Walter was not coming home.

The night had quite closed in; a mild warm night like midsummer. She could scarcely say why she felt so strangely loath to go into the house.

At last she went upstairs, without first going into the Meister's room to bid him good night, though she heard him hobbling about, in evident expectation of her coming in to give him an account of what had passed. But she longed to be alone; and the moment she reached her room, she drew the bolt after her, and lightened her bosom with a few deep drawn sighs. It was so dark, that she groped about some time before she could find her matchbox, which was not in its proper place. Altogether, she thought, some one must have been there, and disturbed the method of her usual arrangements. At last she found her lamp; but before she had lighted it, a musing mood came over her, to which she found the darkness most congenial.

She went to the window, and leaning her brow against the cool glass, she tried to live over the last few hours.

Here, on this very spot, she had poured forth her whole heart in a torrent of tears. Now she felt it aching still, but there was a sweetness in the pain.

She now foresaw that from year to year she would become lonelier and more alone, and that at last she *would* have to give up the only being she loved. But her affection for him — *that* she felt, nothing ever could oblige her to give up. Even if he could be happy without her, she, at least, never could care for any happiness that severed them.

On reflection, she became more composed; nay, cheerful. She began to long for his return, that they might have a quiet evening together like the last.

All at once, she heard a sound quite close to her, she thought it might be he, and that she had overheard his step in the next room.

"Is it you, night rover that you are, Sir?"

No answer — yet she felt certain that she had not mistaken. She listened with sharpened attention; again that suppressed sound. "Who is there?" she called out, with a leaping heart. Still no answer! — She went to the table to light her lamp; suddenly a dark shadow was at her side, and a nimble hand stopped hers, as she was about to strike a light. She was not much startled:

"What are you doing here, Walter?" she said, drawing back; "how did you get in? I thought I had bolted the door. — God in Heaven!" she shrieked. "Peter Lars! — how is this! — What brings you here?"

It was so dark that she could not have recognised him; except for a peculiar trick which he had, and she hated; a hoarse way of breathing audibly.

And now she could distinguish the outline of his figure, and involuntarily retreated towards the door; but with one bound, he had intercepted it —

"Don't be frightened, Mamsell Helene," he said, with an ugly nervous laugh; "I mean no harm. It is not, to be sure, that darling poppet, our young man, who rules the house. It is only the vermin, Peter Lars, that creeping, crawling worm. But a worm won't hurt you, if you don't crush it, and unless you really mean to set that pretty foot of yours upon my ugly head, and —"

"What do you mean by taking such a liberty?" she interrupted him, with a show of self-possession:

"Who ever gave you leave to come here, into my room to make a scene? I should have imagined you to be sufficiently aware of my opinion of you."

"Exactly so," he sneered. "It is precisely because I *am* aware of it, my very dear Mamsell, that I desire to know the reason of it, and what I ever did to vex you. And as you never yet have done me so much honor as to speak to me when we meet elsewhere, I took the liberty of waiting for an interview here. If you should vouchsafe to tell me that I am drunk, allow me to tell *you* that you are wrong. I give you my word I have not drunk a drop more than I found necessary to untie my tongue. Pluck, you know, my dear young lady, is a thing a man never can have too much of; and now I have enough to ask you what you are pleased to object to in my humble person. Eh! we are so cosy here, quite by ourselves — couldn't you be a trifle kinder? Or have you really no kindness left for Peter Lars? Have you been so lavish to your own sweet poppet, and to that precious quilldriver, your new betrothed? Have you nothing to say to a fine young fellow like myself, an aspiring artist, who is, without bravado, worth ten of such?"

"Be silent, sir, and leave the room this instant!" commanded Helen. "Not another word! and you may thank the wine you have drunk, if this insolence —"

"Oho! fair lady, softly! you will be ready to come down a peg or two in a moment; after all, we are two to one, myself and my wine; and when my pluck is up — not to speak of my love, and I adore you — Nay," he added in a lower voice, "I would not harm you for the world. I really had no bad intentions. If you had not been so stupid as to spoil my sport, and find

me out before it was time, I should have let you go to bed in peace. I meant to have crept out after I had made sure that you could not possibly escape me, nor shirk the answers to a question or two I have to ask. I do assure you, proud Mamsell, I have the greatest regard for you — quite a respect — and for all my pluck, if I do stand here to keep you from the door, it is only because —”

He did not see the dangerous light in her eyes; her silence and apparent impassiveness misled him.

“It would almost appear that I really have been so fortunate, as to hit upon a humaner mood. If you would but listen to reason, adored Mamsell, you would find that the varmint, Peter Lars —”

At the same moment he found himself firmly seized by the collar, and thrust aside with a sudden jerk of a resolute woman's hand.

In the darkness, he fell over a chair, and got his feet entangled among the bed-curtains; foaming at the mouth with rage and hate, he freed himself, and rose; but the bolt had been withdrawn, and the girl had flown.

She flew downstairs, and went straight into her brother-in-law's room, waked him; — for as he lay on the sofa he seemed to have had the relief of a short nap; — and told him what had happened. He rose in agitated anger, took his burning candle, and went upstairs to her room with her. But the room was empty. The little miscreant had escaped. In the whole house there was not a trace of him to be found. The Meister called up old Christel, bid her search carefully in every nook and corner, and on no account whatever to open the door, if he should come back at a later hour. Next morning he should be dismissed

in form. Then he asked after Walter, and growled when he heard that he had not yet come home; paced up and down with angry gesticulation, heavily dragging his lame leg after him, till at last he limped downstairs again, leaving his light behind him, without saying one word to Helen, who had been standing silent in the middle of the room.

As soon as ever she found herself alone again, she bolted herself in, with trembling hands, and sank upon a chair by her bedside, pressing her face into her pillows, that she might neither hear nor see a single object that reminded her of the disgraceful scene she had just gone through. After a time the dead stillness of the house brought more calm to her agitated spirit, and quieted the blood that coursed so wildly through her veins.

She rose and looked all through the room again, to convince herself that she really was by herself. There was a recess where she kept her dresses, closed by a curtain, and there he must have stood; she shivered again as she saw the crumpled folds. To rid herself of the odious recollection, she took down a book from her bookshelves, and settled herself with it in a corner of the sofa. But to read it was not so easy; she could not fix her scared ideas to the black letters before her.

She found it insufferably hot and close in that small room, but she feared to stir out of it in case of another ambush. She put down her book, took off the dress that confined her movements, and felt relieved as she walked up and down, with uncovered neck and arms, plaiting up her long dark hair for the night. Her candle was placed so near the glass, that she might

have seen herself quite easily; only her eyes were fixed upon the floor, and her thoughts were far away.

In this manner more than an hour elapsed, and her weariness began to warn her, that it was time to seek some rest, when the door of the adjoining room was cautiously opened, and she heard a light step cross it, and a knock at her bolted door. After the first thrill of momentary terror, the recollection came, that the house had been shut up, the miscreant flown, and Walter not come home.

"Is that you Christel?" she called through the door. A very subdued "yes" came back to her. The old servant often used to come to her before going to bed, to consult her in some kitchen dilemma. Without farther demur, Helen unbolted the door — It was Walter who stood before her in the darkness of the doorway.

"It is I;" he stammered, with a beseeching, almost frightened glance; both faces turned crimson in a moment.

"Helen!" he began again, and she started when she heard him call her by her Christian name. She felt his moody eager eyes upon her. In the dress in which she now stood before him, she might have appeared in any ballroom; only it had never so happened that he had occasion to see her in any other than in her dark high morning-dresses of almost conventual cut.

"What brings you here?" she asked in a tone of cool severity, that was to serve as a mask to the emotion within. "How could you so mislead me? Could not you have told me it was you? Go now, at once. This is no hour for conversation."

He did not move, but stood gazing at her white

shoulders, as if they had been a vision. With ready tact, she felt that it was now too late to cover them with a shawl, while a retreat towards the darker part of the room, would have been an insult to herself.

"Do you hear me?" she repeated, in a tone he could not but obey; "I choose to be alone just now. Any thing you can have to say to me, must keep. I am more vexed than you seem to be aware of. To think that *you* could deceive me! If it should happen again, we two are parted."

His eyes fell before her angry looks, and then she turned away abruptly, and went back to the table, as though he had been already gone, and he did go. She heard him gently shut the door, and slowly walk across the adjoining room.

Before the last lingering step had died away, she was already steeped in the bitterness of remorse and self-rebuke. She had condemned him without a hearing. She called up the mute reproach of those mournful eyes that had been gazing on her, and pictured to herself what he had felt, when she had dismissed him thus. That day had separated them more than they had ever been before. He had not been able to go to sleep without talking it over, as they had always done. Now he had come innocently to her door, and had answered her enquiry without thinking — certainly without meaning mischief, and he had been sent away like a detected culprit; expiating, unawares, the outrage of another man, an hour before.

She found it so intolerable to be alone with this remorse, that she fastened on her dress again, took up her light, and went into the sitting-room.

She would have liked best to go straight up to his

garret-room, to excuse the flightiness of her temper, and to beg him to forget it and forgive her, but from this, on reflection, she desisted. She would rather go downstairs to old Christel, she thought, and speak to her about some household matters; for which, to be sure, there was no hurry, but she was yearning for the sound of some familiar human voice.

When she came to the landing place, she was not a little startled at seeing Walter sitting in the dark, on the upper steps, leaning his head upon both his hands. She could not be certain whether he was awake, or had fallen asleep; for he did not move when the door opened behind him. She set down her candlestick upon the top of the banisters, and in a moment she was seated by his side on the steps; he lifted up his head, and made a movement, as if he would have risen and taken flight.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I hardly know myself, how I came to be sitting here; but I will go upstairs directly —"

"Stop one moment; pray do!" she whispered softly; "I am so glad to find you here; I had no peace after I had been so cross to you. Forgive me; — this has been an agitating day to me in many ways; there have been many things to pain me, and I made you suffer, poor dear, for what you could not help."

He did not answer, but looked straight before him over the dark staircase.

"Are you really angry with me?" she asked; he shook his head. "Angry with you, I never *could* be," he said mournfully.

"What was it that made you come to me so late?" she began again, after a short silence. "You wanted

something, that I saw by your face, only just then, I was in such perplexity about my own affairs, as to seem cross and indifferent to those of others. Would you like to talk to me now?"

"What good would that do? I shall hear it quite soon enough?"

"Hear what?"

Still no answer; only when she said: "I do believe you are seriously vexed with me," it came out at last. "Is it true," he murmured, with averted face; "is it true that you are going to be married to that man?"

She started; a new sensation, strangely sweet, thrilled to her heart. She laughed, as we do laugh, to ourselves, when we are quite alone, at the memory of some delicious moment in the past; of happy love — of brilliant triumph — of success in some feat of our boyish days. What it was that delighted her so much, she could scarcely have defined.

"What makes you think such silly things?" she asked, completely returning to their old footing; "don't you know I shall never be going to be married to any man? When one has had a great big boy to educate, and just got him out of the roughest rudiments, one really has no time for other people; and who would thank me for bringing them such an unruly step-son? Who put these fancies into your head?"

He told her; and they sate there side by side, for some minutes, without saying anything.

"No, indeed, my dear boy," she began at last, in a tone of singular solemnity; "I *never* mean to go and leave you, for the sake of any human creature living. It is no sacrifice on my part; and you owe me nothing

for it. I should have to chain up my own heart first of all, were I ever to settle down to any other mode of life, *any* life in which you were not the first and foremost. I have felt this for years, and shall never feel otherwise probably as long as I live. But for you, there must, of necessity, come a time, when the claims of your little mother will have to be reduced by half; when she will have to content herself with only a duty share in your thoughts and feelings; lucky if she does not fare worse, and be stowed away in the lumber-room of memory, like an antiquated piece of furniture. Don't you contradict me; I know well enough what I have to expect, and a true mother never thinks of herself. All mothers have to bear the same, and the best way to bear it, is with a brave face; and now, away with care! For the present, I am yours, and you are mine; and as far as I am concerned, nothing shall ever part us. I give you my word, and here is my hand upon it, and now—let us go to bed, and sleep upon it.”

She rose, and he mechanically did the same. When she stood at the top of the staircase, and he a few steps lower, she just reached to the tall stripling's forehead; she threw her arms tenderly about his neck.

“You are not to get into the habit of that ugly frown, mind that!” she said caressingly; “frowns don't become you, and you have no reason to frown on life like any old grumpy misanthrope — such a spoiled creature as you may well afford to laugh, — smooth away, I pray, all these precocious wrinkles; and now, my son, good night!” She kissed him softly on the forehead, and passed her hand lightly over his tangling

curls. Then, taking up her candle, she glided back into her own room.

The night that followed on such an eventful day, brought Helen both repose and sleep. She believed her difficulties to be overcome, and her troubles postponed for years at least. But she would hardly have looked so cheerfully after Walter, as he walked away to his day's work at the Burgermeister's Villa, had she known that he had not been able to close his eyes till morning.

In painting that saloon, he was destined to have no assistance but that of the two boys: the Meister being confined to his room, and Peter Lars nowhere to be found. It was rumoured that he had been seen at the "Star." It appeared to be his plan to stay away, and let himself be missed so long as to be received with thanks, and not with abuse, when he did come back at last. However the Meister seemed quite disposed to do without him, gave Walter his instructions, wrote to the capital for more assistance, and sent the truant's things after him to the Star, without wasting any words upon the subject.

Thus a few days elapsed. The atmosphere of the house was lowering; never a laugh now, nor a gay word. These three inmates — for Helen too, had begun to wear a graver face — lived on together, without exchanging more than a necessary word. When Walter came home in the evening — for he did not even leave his work for dinner — he would swallow down the food that had been kept for him, and then go straight to his room,

on plea of fatigue, regardless of the questions asked by poor Helen's melancholy eyes. She well knew that if he left her, it was not to go to bed; for in the morning she always found his light burned down.

And if he left home weary, it was not from over-eagerness to get to his work. The villa was situated at about two miles' distance from the town, just where the forest began and the country became more undulated. It had originally been built as a ducal shooting-box. It had passed through the hands of numerous owners—through some very careless ones; and at last, in a farmer's, had been turned to more profitable purposes. When the Burgermeister bought it, he found it dignified to boast that he had a mere country-seat—a villa that cost so much and rented nothing; and so he decided on having it entirely renovated in the original style, and on opening the gardens to the admiration of the public in the summer season. The distance was no more than a pleasant walk for the townspeople. Yet Walter had been known to take two hours to it and more. The boy apprentices enjoyed a game of ball in the shell-gallery, or a little mischief in the gardens; while their young taskmaster, in his meditations, loitered about among the leafless glades, until the sun, darting into every nook and thicket, would rise so high, as to remind him that he had been sent there in some other capacity than that of overseer to the building of the birds'-nests.

Then he would hurry back to the house, scare the lads with a harshness they had never seen in him before, and fall as violently to work as though he meant to do in a day, or in half a day, what would be the work of weeks. But he would soon let his brush drop,

and sit motionless upon the scaffolding, staring at some vacant spot on the opposite wall, where his fancy had conjured up a charming vision — a pensive face, and the turn of a graceful head resting on snowy shoulders, a pair of admirably moulded arms, of that smooth pearly white, which art so rarely renders, and is but too apt to turn the head of the artist who attempts it.

Almost half the week had been spent in this desultory way, when one morning the Meister called up Walter, and believing the ceiling of the shell-gallery to be finished, all except the centre-piece, he gave him an old engraving to sketch in with charcoal in the necessarily increased proportions. The Meister proposed to be there before twelve o'clock, to see if the sketch would do. It was an engraving after Claude Lorraine, with some architecture in the foreground, set off by a group of lofty trees. As for the sunrise in the background, that, the Meister thought, he should like to do himself.

Walter set off with far more alacrity than usual. His task allured him; frequent practice had made him quick at landscape-drawing, whereas he always preferred to leave the figures to his comrades.

The ceiling had been originally planned with a centre-piece of allegorical figures; but, of course, since Peter Lars' defection, that was not to be thought of now.

Walter was just thinking of this disagreeable personage, and rejoicing in his absence, when he heard a voice behind him, and looking round, he saw the very man coming after him at a brisk pace. He stopped, and waited for him with an instinct of vague

curiosity. He wanted to discover why he had been so suddenly turned off — he had heard no particulars.

The black-faced little fellow, who was walking along in full travelling trim, with staff and knapsack, appeared to be in his happiest mood; his pursed-up lips wore their sliest sneer, with even more decided mischief in it than usual. His eyebrows were drawn up to his cap, and as he called after Walter, his voice sounded like the treble tones of a chaffing boy.

"You are the very man I wanted to see," he began, even before he had come up with him. "Scheiden und meiden thut weh! — partings are grievous, you know; and though I could have done all my partings with my principal in writing, well enough, I wished to take leave of you, for I had a thing or two to tell you, that would not have done quite so well in a letter. So if your people did not forbid you to contaminate yourself with an outlawed miscreant like myself, I will walk your way with you a bit."

"As you please; but tell me what you did, Peter, to bring things to such a sudden crisis?"

"Did? pshaw! a piece of nonsense! I was a donkey, my very dear and very proper young friend, as, of course, you have heard — unless perhaps they did not tell you, lest evil communications should corrupt good manners."

"The chief thing, I suppose, I do know," said Walter reddening. He only knew what old Christel had told him; viz., that Peter had come home drunk, and been disrespectful to Helen.

"The chief thing!" sneered Peter; "a pretty chief thing to make a row about! I have done many such

chief things, and more to the purpose, in my life, and not a cock crowed after me. If I had not been such a confounded ass as to let myself be found out too soon, and get kicked out like a mangy hound *before* I had got what I came for, I could have laughed in my sleeve, even if they did kick me out *after*. As it is, I have made a fool of myself for nothing — got blown up and turned off, while others remain behind to laugh at me as I deserve. Eh! why don't you laugh, Propriety? You see *I* laugh at my own clumsiness!"

"I don't see what there is to laugh at," said Walter coldly; for he bitterly repented of having suffered this little villain to walk by his side.

"Don't, then," he said jeeringly; "Milk-sop that you are! — You have a spirit that is as blond as your head, and as your mother's was, when she suffered herself to be so taken in —"

"Fellow!" cried Walter, flaring up with sudden passion; "if ever I hear my mother's name on your lips, —" and he held his strong fist in the wizened face of his tormentor, who stood still with a look of defiance.

"Softly, old boy, take it coolly," he said. "There are moments, I am aware, when even the sweetest milk is apt to turn sour; but never mind; I don't see what I should gain by quarrelling with you before I go. You always treated me fairly — like a gentleman, I may say; for our principal I was a mere machine; for our adorable Mamsell a toad; you were the only person in the house who treated me as a fellow-creature; and so, old fellow, I mean to do you a good turn before I go. When all the rest are abusing

me, you can say: 'Well, poor devil, he was not so bad a fellow after all!'"

"Come to the point;" said Walter, losing patience; "I have work to do."

"Work, have you? Ah! poor dear, I dare say. Now you have to be first and last; man-of-all-work, and Jack-of-all-trades, until the Meister finds another Peter Lars — if he ever does — or ever looks for one. When the old screw took you in, out of Christian charity, of course he had no idea that you could ever grow up to be a man, and do the work of two, and earn him a mint of money. Oh, no! — not he! he never dreamed of such a thing! I say, has he ever increased your wages? or is my young gentleman too high for such low ideas?"

"What are you driving at? what do you mean by all this nonsense?" cried Walter, out of patience. "What can it signify to you, if my foster-father —"

"Foster-father!" echoed the other, while his eyes were dancing with malicious mirth. "Well, for a foster-father, perhaps, it might be fair enough; but when we come to think of what a real father will do for a son, we can't say much for what he has done for you — especially when we consider what he ought to have done for your mother, that he left undone."

Here he looked Walter full in the face. The young fellow stood before him with heaving chest and quivering nostril, in fearful agitation. He staggered back, and leaned against one of the trees that formed the avenue. With a shriek of sardonic laughter: "Ha! is it possible?" he cried, "just look at him! he really has no suspicion how things stand! Ha! sancta simplicitas! — well, it was your luck that made me stop

a day or two at the 'Star', and lay hold of that old fellow of a porter, who used to be in the Meister's service. I made him tell me the whole story; and, but for me, this pretty pattern of a helpless orphan might have lived to threescore-and-ten, without being so wise as to know its own father!"

Walter still stood thunderstruck — his lips moved, but his voice failed him.

"What makes the boy stand there, turning to stone, as though he had just heard the trumpet sound for the judgment day? I say, don't you go on being the soft chap you are, that anybody can take and twist to their own purposes. You open your eyes, and look sharp, and take what rightfully belongs to you. Take my advice — maintain your place in the world in a proper manner, even if you did come into it in a manner that may be called less proper.

"Come, let us be walking. I have a long way to go, and feel a most desperate desire to get out of sight of that den of Philistines behind us."

"Peter!" said Walter, struggling painfully to recover his composure; "Is there more in what you have just been telling me, than mere talk and gossiping nonsense?"

"Ask the old one, if you don't believe me. Ha! shouldn't I like to see his face, when you come upon him unawares, and call him 'Dad!' And I tell you it is all as true, and as well proved as twice two. And if you had not been really as great a baby as they took such pains to make you, you would have put this and that together, and worked out your little

reckoning years ago. I did, for one, as soon as ever I put my nose into the house. I sometimes tried to give you a hint; and just because you took no notice, 'Aha!' thinks I, 'he knows all about it, and makes believe not to; and of course he has his reasons.'

"Besides, one has only to look at you two together to say — that is the block, and this the chip. The same long limbs, the same build — put you in the same clothes, and look at you from behind, and not one man in ten could say which was which. Of course, what is grown dark and grey and grizzled in him, is carried out in pink and white and yellow with you — the colouring must have been your mother's; and a deuced pretty woman she was, the old porter says. He saw her once, not long before she died; he had to take some money to her — on the sly, of course; since then he has never been able to forget her, he says, and that his master felt so spooney about her, he can't wonder at; far rather, that he could give her up, and marry the wife he did — our charming Mamsell's sister, you know; the two sisters were totally different in everything — except the tin, which was the same. I rather think the Meister must have had a try at the younger sister first, and been rejected; she was a haughty 'Frölen' even then, you see; and so he turned to the other sister, who was neither haughty nor handsome, and so she took him. However, I suppose she wouldn't, if she had but known of your own sweet self — you were just beginning to run about in your first little boots — and had known that her precious husband used, as often as he could get away, to go and have a peep at his former family about three or four times a year, on his business jour-

neys. It was all kept so cosy, that not a soul ever heard of it. A sly fox your governor was — excuse the candour of the remark. But sly he must have been in this business, if you really did live so long without ever having smelt a rat; and in other respects you are as quick a lad as may be. His wife, however, somehow or other, in time did smell it, and hunted it down, and there was the devil to pay and all, as you may fancy. She kept the keys of the strong box, so of course it lay in her power to stop his business-travelling, and she did. More fool she! for it could not tend to improve his temper, you know; and at last, when a letter came — was it a letter, or the porter? — to say that your mother was ill and dying, and past recovery, you can imagine that the governor was not disposed to stand on ceremony. He started off alone, and did not come back for three weeks and more; he had not written either — what could he have written about her illness to his wife? Of course, the worst news of the one, were the best to the other. However, he did come back at last; and she might have lived in peace now that the other woman was dead and buried; only she couldn't. And there was the greatest row of all when one day he came home and surprised her with a little present — orphan or foundling, or whatever he was pleased to call you, — she might be as fractious as she would, the child was there, and there was nothing to be done but to be cruel to it.

“And this she honestly did, to her heart's content, as you know best yourself. The governor was forced to let two and two make five; he was seldom at home, and you were a soft chap then, it seems, as you are

now, and you made no resistance, nor ever even complained of her. At last the old porter could stand the thing no longer; and so he spoke up, and told her it was a shame, and not the poor brat's fault if his mother had pleased his father better than such a vixen could. Of course she made the house too hot to hold him, and he said he felt glad to go, for he could not bear to see a child so knocked about.

"It appears the Meister felt the same, and so he wrote to his sister-in-law to come and stay with them. His wife was ill with spite and rage, and things in the house went topsy-turvy. Well, and so our adorable Helen came, and what she did, I need not tell you. So there it is; and it is a special satisfaction to me" — and he gave a sneering laugh — "that I got hold of Johann, and warmed him with a bottle of Bordeaux, till he let the cat out of the bag. It was a fair trick to play to that old screw.

"You can act upon it as you please; but I know, if I stood in your shoes, I should not let myself be treated like a fatherless beggar, and fed on charity. I would speak up and take another tone. He should send me to travel, I know; with something in my pockets to chink as I went along, to do or to leave undone, what I pleased. What business had he to go and sell your mother for any amount of money-bags whatever? If he did, I should expect the money bags to pay me for it."

With this they had reached the forest. Walter never spoke a word; breathing hard, he strode away as if Lucifer were at his heels. The dwarf kept up with him, waving about his stick, and gesticulating with grimaces so grotesque, as would have made any other

companion laugh. Now he stood still at a spot where the roads diverged, lifted his cap, and turned round, for a last look at the little town he was leaving.

"I am truly thankful, that we definitively quarrelled, the Meister and I, and did not make it up. Do you know, I actually did demean myself so far as to write him a note this morning, with the conditions on which I would have consented to return to him. For that he must miss me sorely, no one can deny. So without ceremony, I wrote. I *may* have been too free and easy, and thawed too fast. But he certainly gave me back as good as he got; for you know, when he is in the vein, he can write and talk like Buonaparte; let him! — If I did knock under, it was for the miserable reason that I could not find it in my heart to part from our charming Mamsell, for all her abuse and scorn.

"Bah! when once I am away from her, I shall come to my senses soon enough. But what I wanted to say to you, my boy, was this: follow my example, do as I do, and cut your chinks. You have no reason to fear that she will treat you ill; far more reason to fear the contrary.

"Do you know that she has given warning to her dangling lawyer? — and do you know why? I will tell you; simply because she is smitten by those two forget-me-nots of yours; and as you happen to be a spoon, you may take your oath that some fine day you will inevitably be sold — that is, married. You may stare if you like, and write me down an ass, if it be not as I tell you. It would be a pity; for, after all, she is your aunt; if not exactly, still she is old enough to be; and by the time you are a man in your prime, like

me, she will be a withered old thing, and the very devil for jealousy, and you will have to sit by the chimney-corner all your life, instead of seeing the world and enjoying life while you are young, as every man ought to do.

"If I had been able to get her, I suppose I should have repented; but then I was madly in love with her, which you are not. With you it would have become a habit, if you go on as you are doing now.

"Well, well, no doubt you will cut your wisdom-teeth, at last. Think on my words, my boy, for I wish you well. Heavens and earth! what a face! — Have I upset you so by helping you to find a father? — and by no means, let me tell you, the worst father you could have; — not by a great deal, though I certainly have no reason to speak well of him. And now fare thee well! old boy, and carry back my compliments to those Philistines in their den. If we should chance to meet again somewhere or other, knocking about the world, I hope I shall find you a trump: give us a parting fist."

He held out his hand, but Walter did not take it; he continued staring vacantly before him and did not move a finger. With a volley of parting imprecations, half vicious and half facetious, Peter Lars twirled his stick, and went sauntering on his way, whistling.

The state in which this dark spirit left the blond, is not to be described. But the tumult of Walter's mind arose from such conflicting sources, that the one appeared to balance the other, and to produce a sort of silent stupefaction; only here and there, a word or two stood out from the chaos, and sounded after all, more strange than ominous.

He sometimes thought his comrade had amused himself by stringing together his own fanciful speculations, which in no way concerned him, and that the best thing he could do would be to laugh at and forget them.

He walked on, therefore, through the forest very cheerfully till he reached the villa; he entered the sunny gallery of which the great glass doors stood open to admit the mild spring-air, and having appointed the two boys their tasks, he climbed up to the scaffolding. He fastened the engraving before him, and proceeded without delay to sketch in the landscape on the white grounding. As before said, he was quick at architectural drawing, and very soon the temple stood out in correct proportions from the high elms and plane-trees that surrounded it.

Meanwhile, Peter Lars's disclosures had lain dormant in his mind, in a sort of unconscious twilight. But when he had finished his temple, and began to wonder whether the Meister would be pleased with it, he suddenly recollected that the Meister had promised to come out himself, and see what he had been doing. Yes, he would come — presently he would walk in by that door — — how should he address him? — how call him? — Meister, as before?

The blood rushed to his forehead, and danced before his eyes. He sat down upon the ladder, and covered his face with his hands. He recalled his past life, and wondered what it would turn to now. Every one of those words of Peter Lars recurred to him — he could have put down every syllable in writing — in characters cut deep into his heart. He read them over again from beginning to end — and the end

made him hesitate. What he had said of Helen appeared improbable — inconceivable — impossible! Yet what could he remember to oppose to it? — how much rather in corroboration of these conclusions? —

His blood was hammering violently at his temples, he dropped the charcoal, for he could not hold it. The deep depression of the first few moments began rapidly to give way to a feeling of rapture, to which he had almost given voice in a shout of ecstasy.

He looked down from his scaffolding, away over the sunny gardens, where the discolored turf was rapidly changing to green velvet, and the young leaves, still folded in their opening buds, were only waiting for one drop of rain to burst forth full length. He heard the singing-birds warbling in the transparent air, and under the roof of the semicircle that formed the gallery, he saw the swallows busy about their nests.

His mood was glad and tender; he no longer thought how he should meet his father; or how he should act in furtherance of his darling wish to turn his back on paintpot and plaster.

He saw nothing but her earnest face, now with an unwonted look of tenderness; and those ivory arms and shoulders; and heard her voice with that accent in which she had said, as she had kissed him on the forehead; "so spoiled a creature can afford to laugh."

He could not tell how long he had been dreaming, until the two boys reminded him that it was time to eat his dinner. And he let them eat it, and remained where he was. He wanted neither meat nor drink.

Presently he started violently, on hearing the old pensioner who kept the gardens, say in answer to somebody's question: "You will find Mr. Walter in the shell-gallery. I scarcely think he means to leave his work to-day, so long as the light lasts."

His knees shook as he got up; and all his self-possession left him at the thought that he was about to see his father for the first time, consciously.

Only it was not the heavy uneven gait he expected that he heard coming up the steps, though the eyes that looked up through the tall windows in search of him upon his scaffolding were not less familiar to him.

"Helen!" he cried. "What brings you here?" and running down the steps, he was by her side in a moment.

Never had he seen her look so charming. A rose on her cheek with the air and exercise — her dark hair blown back in slight disorder under her little hat; her eyes radiant with gaiety, a crimson handkerchief loosely tied about her throat, and on her arm, a basket carefully closed.

"No, no;" she said, as Walter attempted to take it from her; "that is to come afterwards, and is only to be considered as an appendix to my real mission. So first of all I must deliver myself of that: know therefore, Claude Lorraine and his temple and his sunrise are all to be thrown over, and your laudable labours of the morning wasted. It will all have to be rubbed out and done over again. The Burgermeister has just sent to say that he has other projects wherewith to astonish the weak minds of his admiring friends. They are to have Naples and the Medi-

terranean above their heads, and Vesuvius spouting lava over them. Of course the Meister was indignant at any man's presuming to meddle with his business; but you know his worship has his peculiar ideas about the fine arts, and a not so peculiar intolerance of contradiction. And then a most impudent letter from Peter Lars came to make the measure full; and this shock seems to have fallen on the Meister's limbs, so that he is quite unable to walk, or to come himself to look after you, as he proposed; so I said I would come instead, and tell you what I could — and, to-night, he will tell you the rest.

“So there is a truce for you, meanwhile; that is, as far as regards the ceiling. But I don't see, young sir, that you have been so very busy all this time — one or two of those Cupids I see over there have scarcely a leg to stand on, and there are many gaps among the shells and wreaths.”

While her bright eyes were roving over the walls, he stood mute before her, lost in contemplation.

“You are not communicative this morning; I rather think curiosity concerning the contents of my little basket must have struck you dumb. Know then, that my sense of my maternal duties was too strong to let me set out on my diplomatic mission without having made a previous raid into the store-room; for though art may profess to live on bread and water, I never saw that it had any particular objection to meat and wine. And as I don't deny that my walk has made me hungry, we will proceed to explore our basket without farther ado. Only you must find a breakfast-table for us — where it does not smell of plaster and fresh paint, but rather, more seasonably, of spring violets. Let us

walk through the gardens till we find a shady spot and a bench. Every other essential of an idyll is here already."

He laughed, though he did not seem to have heard; he answered half shyly, half absently, in monosyllables.

As they walked down the steps of the gallery together, the greybearded pensioner doffed his cap and nodded, with a sort of complacency and paternal admiration of the handsome young couple, that made the young man flush to his temples, as though he had heard the most hidden secrets of his heart proclaimed from all the tree-tops.

He walked beside his companion without offering her his arm. He had silently possessed himself of the basket, in spite of her resistance; and she had slung her hat upon her arm in its place.

"It is not yet time for the sun to be dangerous," she said, and looked steadily upwards at it; her face was radiant with unwonted gaiety.

"Don't we feel as if we had broken loose from prison," she said, "when once we fairly escape from the town? A person who has always lived in such a place as this need never grow old, I fancy — or at least, never feel old, which would be the same thing. In fact, if I were not ashamed of myself in the face of that venerable warrior, I feel as if I could begin to dance, even at my advanced age; the birds would make a charming band."

"Come then and try," he said; "what would be the harm of it? — The avenue is smooth enough."

She shook her head. "Breakfast first, and then, not play, but work; I have so much to do at home, and

have done nothing; the house is an abomination to look at." — He did not press her farther, and hardly ventured to look at her as they walked along together under the high trees.

They did not meet a soul, the grounds were running wild; the Burgermeister had quarrelled with the gardener over the projected improvements, and dismissed him; so there had been a sudden stoppage, and there were traces of this stoppage everywhere. But this unbroken solitude made the place all the more enjoyable.

They came to a halt before a running stream that had been expanded to an artificial lake. A wooden bridge had led across it to a little island, where swans were kept, and a hermitage had been built beneath a group of tall ash-trees. This bridge was to have been carried away and replaced by a new one, but by the time the first half of his intentions had been carried out, his worship dispatched a counter-order; and at present there was no way of getting to the island but by a single plank loosely thrown across the bridge posts. Helen was perplexed.

"I don't trust myself to cross," she said; "though I think that plank would carry me; but I am afraid it would make me giddy."

"The swan is sitting," he said, half to himself; "it is pretty to see her; and then her mate, how he flaps his wings, and flies at any body who comes too near."

"Have you been over?"

"Often; it is quite safe; come, let me carry you."

"We shall both fall in," and she laughed; "let us rather give it up."

"Don't; I want to shew you the hut; and there

is a table in it, where we might have our breakfast. You take hold of the basket, and leave the rest to me."

He had her already in his arms — he hardly felt her weight; but the loose plank swung and shook under his feet, and she clung to him with both her arms round his neck. He stopped in the middle of the rushing waters. "Suppose," — he said, and his tone was strange; — "one, two, three, eyes shut, and a jump, and it would be over."

"Don't talk so wickedly," she whispered; and he felt how her heart was beating. —

When he had carried her over, he still held her high above the ground. "I should like to try how long I could carry you without being tired," said he. And she: "I can't say I should like to try anything of the kind. I have had seats that were more comfortable, and I only wish I were safe over on the other side again; — but here we are at the Hermitage. Suppose all the people who ever walked about under these trees, were all to appear at once, what a curious masquerade it would be!"

"I had rather do without them;" he said between his teeth.

"Still, those must have been strange times," she continued, in a contemplative mood; "Pigtails and powder, and trumpery dress swords; and with these they played at being hermits and Arcadian shepherds. Nature is sure to avenge herself; turn her out as often as you please, and she always slips in again, in some disguise or other."

"There are the swans;" and he pointed them out at some distance. She thought it a pretty sight to see

the brooding mother placidly sitting upon her eggs, while her mate, in jealous haste, was vigilantly swimming his patrol all round the nest.

"Do you hear him? how he hisses and threatens?" asked Walter.

"Yes, and it makes me feel disquieted; almost as if he were agitated by human passion; and the contrast with the soft snow of his plumage makes it still more curious. — I could stand here and watch these creatures for hours together. Now let us go and sit in the hut, there is rain coming in those clouds."

And in fact the first large drops were falling; pattering upon the bark roof of the hut; they heard the sweet spring rain, and smelt it, with the scent of a thousand blossoms wafted to them through the little cobweb-curtained window; and as they sat on the only bench, eating their breakfast off the roughhewn table, they looked through the open door over the surface of the water all fretted and rippled by the rain. The birds had ceased their song; and the two sat silent, listening to the splashing and streaming above their heads.

"We can't even see to the other side," she said; "the rain is falling like a thick veil; shutting us out from the rest of the world — which would not be so great a loss after all."

"It looks as if we really were upon some desert island in the deep sea;" he said, gazing on the water; "I only wish that shore were really farther off; and that we were floating far away out of sight."

"A pretty Robinson you would make, to be sure, spoiled boy that you are!"

"Why? — have I not all I want here with me?"

"Yes, till we come to the bottom of the basket, and have emptied our one bottle; after that perhaps we might do battle to the poor swans, and prey upon their eggs; and then the comedy would be over, and the tragedy would begin. I read one, once, about a Count Ugolino, whom they threw into a deep dungeon, with his children, to be starved to death. But I don't think I should like to see it acted; still less, to take a part in it."

He kept his eyes fixed on the little glass she had brought with her, and had now filled for him.

"What man cares to sate his body," he murmured, "if his soul be famished? I should prefer the reverse; should not you?"

"I don't think I always understand you now — you sometimes say odd things."

"Drink out of this same glass then; and then, you know, you will be able to guess my thoughts." He held it towards her; his whole face was glowing, his eyes avoided hers, as they looked at him with surprised enquiry. She took the glass, but held it in her hand, without drinking.

"I wish it could really help one to guess them. There is a certain young man of my acquaintance, who used to have no secrets from me, and of late he has been a mystery with seven seals; but I doubt if the truth be really in this wine. I rather think ——"

She stopped short, for a sudden perception began to dawn on her mind, though she could hardly trust herself to admit it. He had raised his eyes now, and was looking at her with wrapt gaze.

"Helen," he said, "when a man feels choking it is too late to ask him what strangles him? All I know is, that I shall have to go away, and leave you —"

"Go away! why, what are you thinking of?"

"You may well ask," he said, in a tone of desperation, without venturing to look up. "I only know too well, I cannot live without you."

His words thrilled to her very marrow; she held the wineglass unconsciously, without seeing how she was spilling the wine.

"That is not what I meant," she said. "What makes you talk so strangely?"

She would have risen, but he seized her hand so eagerly, that she dropped the glass.

"Do not go," he cried. "Oh! stay and listen to me! You must. I must talk so, because it is what I feel, and you must hear it, or it will kill me. All this time I have felt as if my heart were dead within me. To me there is nothing in the whole wide world but you. If this island were to float away, and carry us away where nobody could reach us, you know you would be mine and I yours to all eternity — you cannot deny that; and therefore what difference should the world make to us? Can all the talking and the gossiping in the world, make us one jot more happy or one jot more wretched? You have nobody to consider; I am what I always was — a penniless, homeless orphan; for if I have a father living, I have no desire to see him. Why should we go back to those people? We might cross the seas together; to any wilderness, where there is nobody to ask for baptismal certificates, or parish registers; and there we might be all in all to each other

and be happy, and then we might afford to laugh at a world that would have grudged us our happiness."

He held her hand tight between both his own, while the words fell from his lips in burning haste, and his devouring eyes were fastened on her downcast lashes, or watching the quivering of her parted lips.

She could not speak; her brain was reeling, and her ears ringing. She could not distinguish every word, but his meaning went straight to her heart.

"Helen!" he cried, and dropping her hand, he caught her all trembling to his heart; lifting her from the ground, and covering her face with passionate kisses.

The intoxication that had so carried him away lasted but a second. With a violent effort, she tore herself from his arms, and stood breathless, facing him with flaming eyes. "No more!" she said. "Not another word! thank God rather, that I have sense enough left for both, to take your words for what they are, for the vagaries of an idle brain. Were I so foolish as to take this nonsense for downright earnest, you should never look upon my face again. But even a mother's indulgence has its bounds, and if ever you are seized with such another fit of madness in my presence, the last word will have been spoken between us two. I shall take good care, however, that you do not so easily forget yourself again. Hitherto I have forgiven many things; I trusted to the natural candour of your disposition. But I am afraid you are not much better than most young men of your age. I am sorry to believe it of you, both for your-

self and me. But it serves me right, for supposing that ten years could be enough to know a man; even when one has brought him up oneself!"

He stood before her without being able to utter a single word. If the earth had opened and swallowed him up, it would have been a relief to him. In the tumult of his ideas, he tried in vain to make her words agree with all that he had seen and heard within the last few days; had he ventured to look at her, he might have had some suspicion of the struggle in her soul, while she was uttering those annihilating words.

"The rain is over;" she said after a pause, in a tone of complete indifference, "I must go."

He prepared to follow her.

"I can find my way without you;" she said; "now that I know that the plank is safe. Good-bye, Walter, you can send the basket by one of the boys."

She stopped on the threshold of the hut. "See how suddenly all the leaves have burst their buds," she said, and her voice had completely recovered its tranquil tone. "Everything in nature has its season; we can change nothing, and prevent nothing. Give me your hand, dear boy. I am not going to leave you to mope by yourself, because you have just given me another proof that you are but a child, and a dreamer of childish dreams. I am not a bit angry with you now; so let us make haste and forget all those ugly passionate words we said. By-and-by you will laugh at them as I do now. And when you come home this evening, I hope you will bring us your own bright face again, and the best resolutions henceforth, to honour and obey your own little mother, that your days may be — as the fourth commandment says. Bless you, my son."

She looked back affectionately at him, and waved her hand to say good-bye, and then she walked steadily over the plank, with her light elastic step, and turned into one of the paths that led through the wood on the other side.

As long as she was to be seen, Walter looked after her; then he flung himself on the grass, with his face to the ground, in an agony of shame and grief, and self-reproach. He did not know that as soon as she was out of sight, her brave heart failed her; she stopped, and leaning her head against the stem of a young tree, she too relieved herself by a flood of tears.

The day was fading into twilight; in the Meister's room it had grown too dark for him to do anything until the lamp was brought. Putting by the water-color sketch of Naples and Mount Vesuvius, in which he had been making some alterations in the foreground with a piece of chalk, he was just about to exchange his favorite old dressing gown with the sheepskin, for a more appropriate garment for an evening walk, when the door was opened noiselessly, and Helen came in, with a serene countenance, and an unfaltering voice that belied all her agitations of the morning.

"Good evening, brother. I have been longer away than I expected. I had a little piece of business to do on my way home, that should have been settled long ago — Christel has been taking good care of you, I hope? How have you been? better?"

The unusual friendliness of her manner took him by surprise, and stopped the reproaches that had been ready on his lips. "How does the gallery get on?" he asked, instead of answering. "You will have been standing chattering there so long, that there will not have been much work done."

"I left the gallery about twelve o'clock;" she said with a faint blush. "If I had not gone astray among the woods, and done that business on my way back, I should have been here ever so long ago. After all, it would not so much signify, if the work were to last a few days longer. The grounds are hardly planned, and the gallery will certainly be finished in a week. Have you heard whether that assistant is to be counted on?"

"Not yet, why do you ask?"

She took a chair and seated herself with her back to the light. "I will tell you why," she said. "I have been thinking over what you said the other day, and I begin to see that you were right, when you said it was time for Walter to be sent from home; I know him too well, not to see that for him, it would be waste of time and talents, to go on plodding as he is doing now, in this narrow sphere of action. If he is ever to attain the full development of which he is capable, we must transplant him to a more congenial soil. However, I am aware that you would find it hard to keep him in a strange place, unless he were to earn his own livelihood by his present trade; and that would be hard on him, for he takes no pleasure in it, and will take still less, if you send him among strangers."

She paused, for her voice was failing her; he stood

at the other window, looking away from her, and drawing upon the vapoury panes with his finger.

"Brother-in-law," she began again: "I have just done a thing without your knowledge, that I hope you will approve of, as it is for Walter's good. As I was walking home just now, I thought over all those long years we have lived together, and I confess I have not been so friendly with you as I should have been, to make our lives pleasanter to both. I am sorry for it now. There were some things I never could forget, although they were past and over, and we know that no one human being has any right to judge another.

"With regard to Walter, I have not so much to reproach myself. I did my duty by him, as far as I saw it; and I see that I would *not* be doing it now, if I were to keep him at home, merely because I find it hard to part from him. So it occurred to me, as the best plan for us all, that I could give him an independence, by making him my heir, as a mother should her only son. Don't mistake me, I am not thinking of dying — only of making my will; and as women are ignorant in such matters, as soon as I had made up my mind, I went straight to the proper authority, Dr. Hansen, and asked him what would be the surest way of making a will — not only with a sound mind, but a sound body — and of laying down the burthen of one's thalers in the most legal form."

"You spoke to Hansen about this?"

"I did; and found him quite willing to assist me. I had a deed of gift drawn up, which he will bring this evening, written out in proper form. I also begged him to join you, as trustee for the management of the

property, and to provide for Walter's wants until he becomes of age. I hope you will not object to this."

"Helen!" — cried the Meister — "and you yourself?"

"Don't imagine I could forget myself," she said merrily. "I took good care to keep enough for my own livelihood; especially as I mean to look out for a situation in some respectable family where there is an orphan to bring up. I have been in a good school for that you know."

"And when you are old, and feel loath to be dependent upon strangers, though you may think it so easy now?"

"I should not be forlorn or forsaken even then," she said very earnestly. "I shall find a home for my old age in my dear Walter's house, and I hope his young wife will never turn me from the door." A long silence ensued.

"You don't seem to be entirely satisfied with my plan, brother," she began again. "But it really is the best plan for all of us. When your son is taken off your hands, you will be able to do what you have wished for all your life. You can sell this house and garden, give up the business, and go to Italy for a year or two. In that lovely Italy you rave about, you would soon shake off your horrid rheumatisms, that torment you so. And one fine day, Walter would cross the Alps and join you, when he finished his studies; and then you could shew him all those marvels of Art and Nature you are always yearning after, and you would be happy both together — and I —"

Her voice faltered, she could not continue. The Meister turned from the window, — and, in an instant, --

for she was too unsuspecting to prevent him, he had flung himself upon his knees before her, as though he had lost his senses. He hid his rough grey head upon her lap, smothering the strange sounds that fell from his lips; stammering and sobbing in wordless protestation.

"Don't, brother;" she whispered, in a trembling voice, bending over him; "come to your senses, and hear me out. I have a favor to ask of you in return, that you may not feel inclined to grant me, and in case you should refuse it, the whole plan falls to the ground."

He looked up in her face, without rising from his knees. The great strong man lay helpless and crushed by the tempest of feeling that had swept over him. He had taken one of her hands, and pressed it to his lips. She went on.

"This thing I am going to do would be of no use whatever, if Walter ever came to know I did it. He is not a child now; he has the pride and the sensitiveness of a man. Were he to know that he owed this inheritance to me, he never would accept it: my most solemn protestations would be in vain. I might swear to him that all my happiness is placed in his; that the only interest I have on earth, is to provide for his future welfare; it would be no use, he would reject it all. Therefore it behoves us to take the proper measures to deceive him; and the safest way to deceive him in this, would be to undeceive him in another matter: he must know his father, and his father must be thanked for the change in his fortunes."

The Meister sprang to his feet, and paced to and fro in violent agitation.

"Never!" he cried at last; "It is impossible, Helen, I can't do it."

"What can't you do?" and she looked very grave. He stood still before her with an imploring look.

"Don't ask me to do that," he said; "It costs me nothing to take that dear boy to my heart, and call him son, if you think it is in your power to absolve me from the promise I made your sister. But that I should appear as his benefactor, I who have done him and his poor mother such grievous wrong —" She interrupted him —

"That wrong has been expiated, brother; and what there may remain, will be expiated now by the penance I prescribe. I too have some wrong to expiate, though not of my own doing. Had my poor sister, in the delirium of her revenge, not destroyed the inheritance you had a right to expect, things would have happened differently. Promise me, therefore, to do as I ask you, and give me your hand upon it. Believe me, it will be the saving of us all." She rose; "I hear steps in the passage," she said; "if it be Walter, I hope you will not let this night pass, without having spoken to him. Only do not tell him that it was I who proposed his going; he has a real father now. I abdicate my authority, and lay down my duties in your hands. I know he will not have to suffer for the change." So saying, she left the room, without waiting for his answer.

In the passage she met, not Walter, but the lawyer; who had brought the deed of gift.

"I have already talked it over with my brother-in-law;" she said in a kindly tone, to the silent man before her. "He has consented to do as I wish, and now I leave the rest to you and him, with entire confidence in you both; would you be so kind as to go in and tell him what you think about it?"

And bowing slightly to him, she passed on, to go into the garden. There, in the morning, she had left the bushes and the fruit-trees with their buds all shut, and now they were clothed in tenderest green.

She looked at them with tranquil pleasure; and while she walked down the narrow gravel path, she thought to herself how soon she would have to leave them, never to see them more. But there was not a shade of regret in her meditations, and her heart, that had passed through so many storms, had come to a sudden calm.

Half an hour later, she heard Dr. Hansen's step on the pavement of the little court, which he crossed, and she saw that he was coming through the garden gate. She made an effort to conceal a gust of emotion that suddenly came over her, and she looked searchingly in his serious face.

"What news do you bring me? I hope we have not forgotten anything that may prove a hindrance to so simple a desire as mine is? —"

"Nothing," he answered gravely. "It is settled in the most formal manner, and all I have to do in this house in the capacity of lawyer, may be considered as definitively concluded. Will you forgive me, if I say that the lawyer has not succeeded in silencing the

man? — who *will* speak, even though he has so much reason to fear that he will not find a hearing.”

He paused, as if in expectation of some sign to interpret in his favor, or against him.

She said nothing, and his courage rose.

“You know how I feel;” he continued, “and after our recent conversation on Sunday evening, I certainly should not have presumed to molest you with another word that sounded hopeful. Only the day after, I ascertained from your brother-in-law, what I had already surmised with pain, that your reason for rejecting every suitor who presented himself, was because you felt no security that he sought you, not for your fortune, but for yourself.

“It was small consolation for me to know that it was not, in the first instance, any special aversion to myself, that had cut me off from all my hopes of happiness. What could I ever do to convince you of the bitter injustice of your distrust? — If my undeclared devotion has not proved it to you in all those years, what farther assurance of mine could ever convince you of it? But to-day you were so good as to take me into your confidence, and to allow me to look deeper into your heart, than would have been necessary for a simple affair of business. In my office I could not thank you; and here — will you take me for a madman, if I have not given up all hope, and venture to ask whether circumstances may not have arisen to induce you to change your mind? In me, you will never find a change.”

She kept her eyes cast down. “Do not ask me

now," she said, with quivering lips. "I have need of all my resolution to do what has to be done, and it has been sorely tried."

"Not now?" he whispered, "nother time then?"

"My dear kind friend," she said, now looking him full in the face; "if you really be a friend to me, wait until that young moon that is just rising, has run its course, before you come here again. There is a strange chaos in my mind. You would hardly understand it, if I were to try to explain, and unravel all its mysteries. They will unravel themselves in time, and then you may come for an answer to your question. A clear straight-forward answer. This is all I can give you for to-day."

"It is more than I dared to hope; more than I deserve," he said, with deep emotion, and bent low to kiss the hand she had offered him as farewell, and so they parted.

Four weeks later, the same pale crescent that had lighted our yellow-haired young friend through the woods that evening, was shining in full refulgence upon a street of a great city, in the quarter chiefly inhabited by students and artists. Close to the open window of a small lodging on the third story, catching the last glimpse of fading light, a young man was seated before a great drawing board; with bold pencil drawing great broad sepia lines, to relieve with light and shade a correct and tasteful architectural ornament.

His landlady came in with a letter in her hand. "From home;" she said, laid it down upon the table, and left the room again. The colour-box and drawing board were thrown aside, and in an instant, with trembling haste, he had broken the seal.

The young artist seated himself upon the window-sill, and read as follows:

"My dear spoiled boy! That we have been almost three weeks parted, is a fact I should find incredible, did I not know my almanack too well for reasonable disbelief.

"There, the day of your departure has been branded with a thick black stroke, and the days on which your letters came, distinguished with bright red ones. It is a fact, for nineteen long days we have been deprived of our six-foot son, and for how much longer, is past all present reckoning.

"I began several letters which I never finished. I knew that your father wrote, so that as for news, you were not starved. Anything more your little mother might have wished to say, though she certainly is no sentimental writer, would only have tended to make you homesick; and home is a thing with which, at present, you are to have nothing more to do.

"I had the satisfaction of hearing by your last letter, that you find your new mode of life already becoming congenial to you; that your work absorbs you, and your comrades suit you. Here steps in maternal jealousy at once, and in terror of losing you altogether, I write this letter as reminder; also because I have a thing

or two to tell you which may not be indifferent to you.

"In the first place, you must know, that yesterday was the day appointed for the magic ceremonies with which the Burgermeister thought fit to inaugurate his villa. The Heavens were pleased to smile on his designs, and favored him with the loveliest day this year has brought. In the grounds and garden, every flower that grows and blows, was in full bloom and fragrance. Our worthy host — you know him in his gala mood — was courtesy itself. Wife and daughter attired from head to foot, in correctest taste and newest fashion; and we poor provincials rigged out in our best, each one according to his abilities.

"What will you say to your little mother, when you hear that she turned out in full ball dress! — worse — what will you say when you hear that she actually danced? — Not merely a sober polonaise with our host, who led us by torchlight all over the house, down to the lowest cellar, and into the park and grounds — but actually valse and écossaises; even a heel-splitting mazurka, which your rival of old, the young referendarius, led off with the daughter of the house.

"Alas! poor boy, it is not to be concealed from you, that the venerable guardian of your youth took strange advantage of your absence, to wax wild and wanton in her old age.

"Not only did I join the giddy throng myself; whirling round our well-known gallery of shells, perfectly undaunted by any flaming volcano whatsoever, but I succeeded in turning a far stronger and more re-

spectable head to my own mischievous purposes, and I fear we are a superannuated couple who have fed the gossips with our follies, for some time.

"My dear child, it is my own confession, or you might refuse to believe the papers when you read it in them. Your mamma has finally made up her mind to give you a stepfather, and her decision was solemnly celebrated last night in a select circle of authorities and townspeople. Your mother's health and her bridegroom's, was drunk with all the honors, as the clock struck twelve.

"At first I thought that all the world must be astonished, and would regard it as no less improbable than improper, that a mother should think of weddings, when she has a great grown-up son so far away. But, judging by their words at least, it did not astonish them at all, and they seemed to think it quite correct; and so after all, I daresay, there is no one to find fault with us, save precisely this grown-up son. Here I would make the appropriate observation that a dutiful child never presumes to judge its parents, but rather looks respectfully on all their actions, as emanations of a maturer judgment.

"In the fond hope that my dear Walter is just such a dutiful child, I send him his stepfather's love meanwhile, and I trust that he will not fail to bring us his in return, when some fine day he comes back to us as a distinguished architect; when, instead of the poky old house we are to take possession of in autumn, he will have to build us a sunny airy villa outside the gates; though I should not care for volcanoes or shell-galleries.

"And now I must say good-bye to you for to-day. He (major) is just come to fetch me for a walk; and as he is to be my master, of course I must obey. Only about your father; he has grown quite young again, and his leg is quite alert — to be sure the days are warm, and I don't really think, that without that trip to Italy — It is no use trying. My master will not leave me time to finish — I begin to fear that I have sold myself to cruel bondage. Thank Heaven! I have a great strong son to threaten with, who, I trust, will never forget, or cease to care for his
"little mother."

"P. S. It would be dishonesty in me to suppress poor Lottchen's love: she asked after you the very first thing, with a charming little air of melancholy; which, however, did not prevent her dancing every dance, and eating a vielliebchen at supper with the Burgermeister's son. Alas! they are all alike! — Youth is given to folly; and even age — —!"

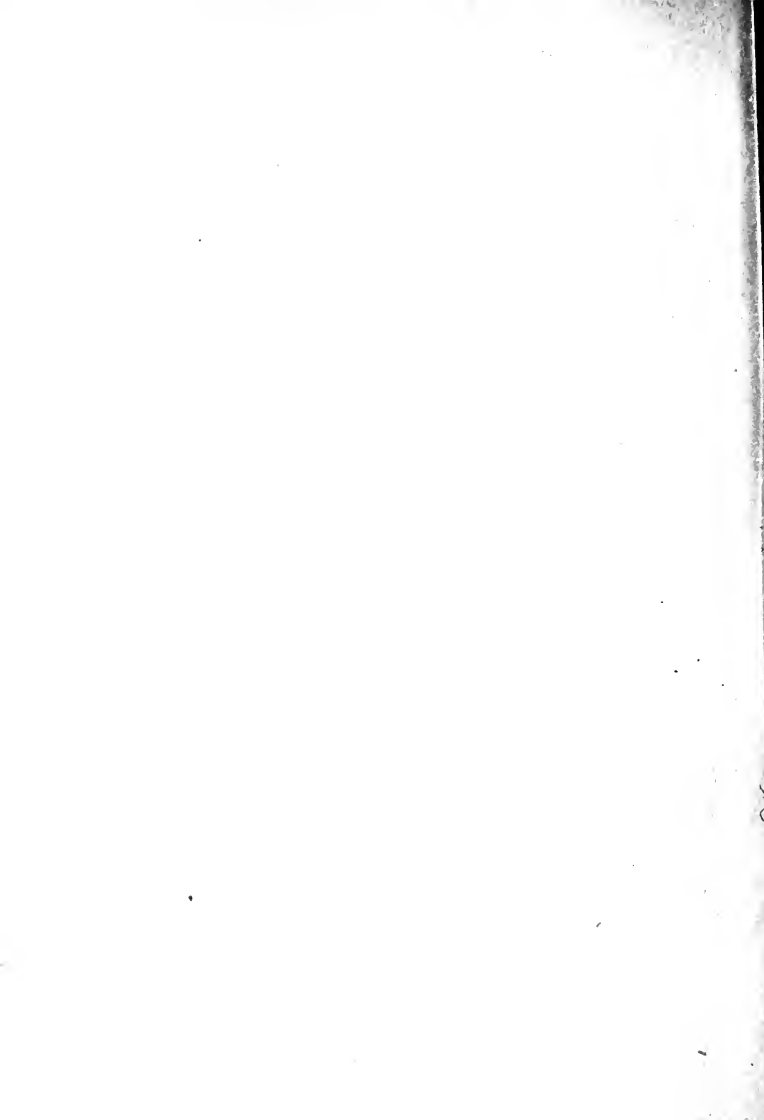
Here came a long dash of the pen, which Walter sat looking at, without moving for half an hour. Only when his landlady came in to ask him whether he would have his lamp, he stared at her, shook his head, and carefully putting away the letter in his pocket, he went downstairs, and away towards a distant quarter of the town, to a modest little wine-house, where he was wont to meet his comrades once a week, to enjoy a sociable evening.

When he came home about twelve o'clock, his landlady heard him singing a snatch of a student song as he walked up stairs — a very unusual circumstance.

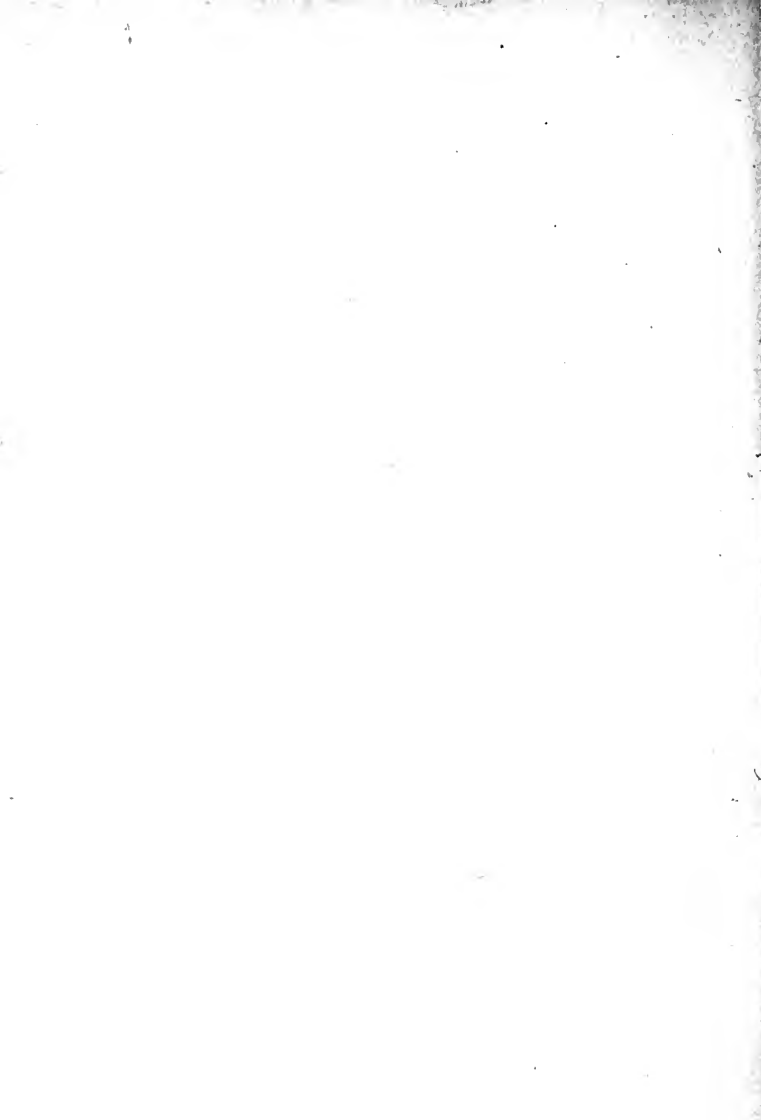
“What can have made him so jolly to-night, I wonder?” she said to herself as she pulled the bed clothes over her ears; “he must have had very good news from home. — This is the first letter he ever got, that made him go to bed singing!”

THE END.

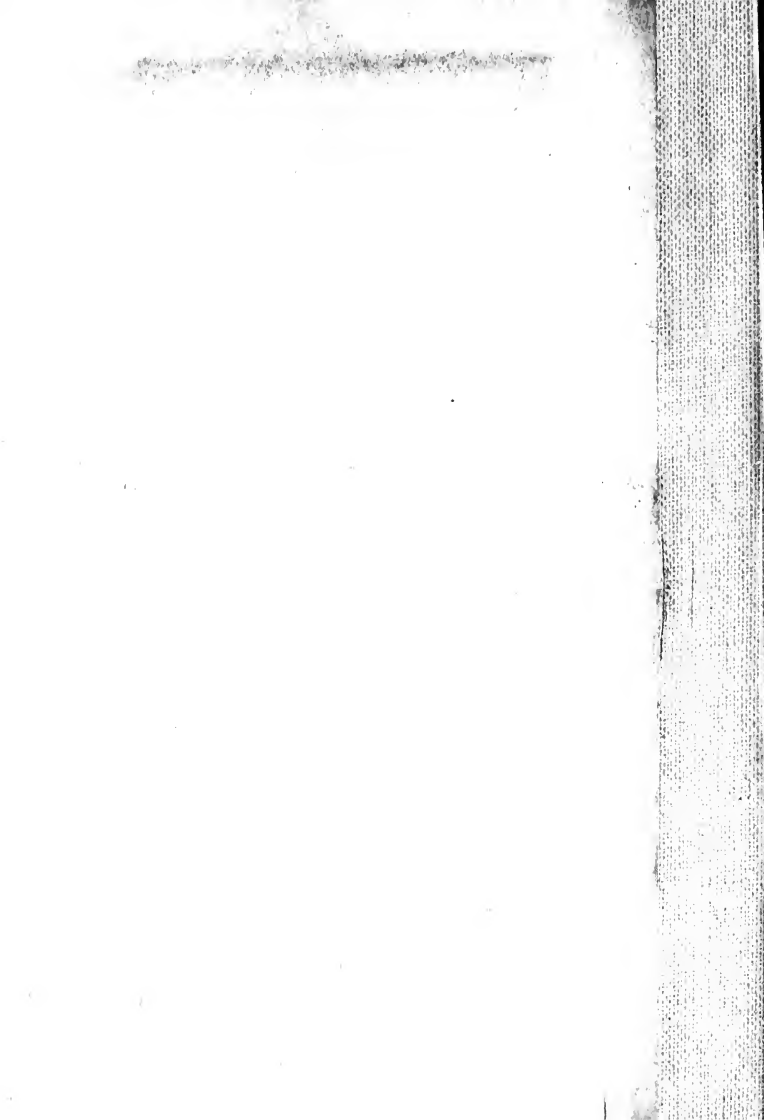
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